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COMPILATION OF GENERAL COMMENTS AND GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED BY HUMAN RIGHTS TREATY BODIES

Note by the Secretariat

This document contains a compilation of the general comments or general recommendations adopted, respectively, by the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

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I

GENERAL COMMENTS

adopted by the Human Rights Committee*

Introduction**

The introduction to document CCPR/C/21/Rev.1 (General comments adopted by the Human Rights Committee under art. 40, para. 4, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; date: 19 May 1989) explains the purpose of the general comments as follows:

> "The Committee wishes to reiterate its desire to assist States parties in fulfilling their reporting obligations. These general comments draw attention to some aspects of this matter but do not purport to be limitative or to attribute any priority between different aspects of the implementation of the Covenant. These comments will, from time to time, be followed by others as constraints of time and further experience may make possible.
>
> "The Committee so far has examined 77 initial reports, 34 second periodic reports and, in some cases, additional information and supplementary reports. This experience, therefore, now covers a significant number of the States which have ratified the Covenant, at present 87. They represent different regions of the world with different political, social and legal systems and their reports illustrate most of the problems which may arise in implementing the Covenant, although they do not afford any complete basis for a worldwide review of the situation as regards civil and political rights.
>
> "The purpose of these general comments is to make this experience available for the benefit of all States parties in order to promote their further implementation of the Covenant; to draw their attention to insufficiencies disclosed by a large number of reports; to suggest improvements in the reporting procedure and to stimulate the activities of these States and international organizations in the promotion and protection of human rights. These comments should also be of interest to other States, especially those preparing to become parties to the Covenant and thus to strengthen the cooperation of all States in the universal promotion and protection of human rights."

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* For document references see annex I.

** See Report of the Human Rights Committee, Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 40 (A/36/40), annex VII.

GENERAL COMMENT 1 Reporting obligation (Thirteenth session, 1981)

States parties have undertaken to submit reports in accordance with article 40 of the Covenant within one year of its entry into force for the States parties concerned and, thereafter, whenever the Committee so requests. Until the present time only the first part of this provision, calling for initial reports, has become regularly operative. The Committee notes, as appears from its annual reports, that only a small number of States have submitted their reports on time. Most of them have been submitted with delays ranging from a few months to several years and some States parties are still in default despite repeated reminders and other actions by the Committee. The fact that most States parties have nevertheless, even if somewhat late, engaged in a constructive dialogue with the Committee suggests that the States parties normally ought to be able to fulfil the reporting obligation within the time limit prescribed by article 40 (1) and that it would be in their own interest to do so in the future. In the process of ratifying the Covenant, States should pay immediate attention to their reporting obligation since the proper preparation of a report which covers so many civil and political rights necessarily does require time.

GENERAL COMMENT 2 Reporting guidelines (Thirteenth session, 1981)

1. The Committee has noted that some of the reports submitted initially were so brief and general that the Committee found it necessary to elaborate general guidelines regarding the form and content of reports. These guidelines were designed to ensure that reports are presented in a uniform manner and to enable the Committee and States parties to obtain a complete picture of the situation in each State as regards the implementation of the rights referred to in the Covenant. Despite the guidelines, however, some reports are still so brief and general that they do not satisfy the reporting obligations under article 40.

2. Article 2 of the Covenant requires States parties to adopt such legislative or other measures and provide such remedies as may be necessary to implement the Covenant. Article 40 requires States parties to submit to the Committee reports on the measures adopted by them, on the progress made in the enjoyment of the Covenant rights and the factors and difficulties, if any, affecting the implementation of the Covenant. Even reports which were in their form generally in accordance with the guidelines have in substance been incomplete. It has been difficult to understand from some reports whether the Covenant had been implemented as part of national legislation and many of them were clearly incomplete as regards relevant legislation. In some reports the role of national bodies or organs in supervising and in implementing the rights had not been made clear. Further, very few reports have given any account of the factors and difficulties affecting the implementation of the Covenant.

3. The Committee considers that the reporting obligation embraces not only the relevant laws and other norms relating to the obligations under the Covenant but also the practices and decisions of courts and other organs of the State party as well as further relevant facts which are likely to show the degree of the actual implementation and enjoyment of the rights recognized in the Covenant, the progress achieved and factors and difficulties in implementing the obligations under the Covenant.

4. It is the practice of the Committee, in accordance with Rule 68 of its Provisional Rules of Procedure, to examine reports in the presence of representatives of the reporting States. All States whose reports have been examined have cooperated with the Committee in this way but the level, experience and the number of representatives have varied. The Committee wishes to state that, if it is to be able to perform its functions under article 40 as effectively as possible and if the reporting State is to obtain the maximum benefit from the dialogue, it is desirable that the States representatives should have such status and experience (and preferably be in such number) as to respond to questions put, and the comments made, in the Committee over the whole range of matters covered by the Covenant.

GENERAL COMMENT 3 (Thirteenth session, 1981)

Article 2: Implementation at the national level

1. The Committee notes that article 2 of the Covenant generally leaves it to the States parties concerned to choose their method of implementation in their territories within the framework set out in that article. It recognizes, in particular, that the implementation does not depend solely on constitutional or legislative enactments, which in themselves are often not *per se* sufficient. The Committee considers it necessary to draw the attention of States parties to the fact that the obligation under the Covenant is not confined to the respect of human rights, but that States parties have also undertaken to ensure the enjoyment of these rights to all individuals under their jurisdiction. This aspect calls for specific activities by the States parties to enable individuals to enjoy their rights. This is obvious in a number of articles (e.g. art. 3 which is dealt with in General Comment 4 below), but in principle this undertaking relates to all rights set forth in the Covenant.

2. In this connection, it is very important that individuals should know what their rights under the Covenant (and the Optional Protocol, as the case may be) are and also that all administrative and judicial authorities should be aware of the obligations which the State party has assumed under the Covenant. To this end, the Covenant should be publicized in all official languages of the State and steps should be taken to familiarize the authorities concerned with its contents as part of their training. It is desirable also to give publicity to the State party's cooperation with the Committee.

GENERAL COMMENT 4 Article 3 (Thirteenth session, 1981)

1. Article 3 of the Covenant requiring, as it does, States parties to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights provided for in the Covenant, has been insufficiently dealt with in a considerable number of States reports and has raised a number of concerns, two of which may be highlighted.

2. Firstly, article 3, as articles 2 (1) and 26 in so far as those articles primarily deal with the prevention of discrimination on a number of grounds, among which sex is one, requires not only measures of protection but also affirmative action designed to ensure the positive enjoyment of rights.

This cannot be done simply by enacting laws. Hence, more information has generally been required regarding the role of women in practice with a view to ascertaining what measures, in addition to purely legislative measures of protection, have been or are being taken to give effect to the precise and positive obligations under article 3 and to ascertain what progress is being made or what factors or difficulties are being met in this regard.

3. Secondly, the positive obligation undertaken by States parties under that article may itself have an inevitable impact on legislation or administrative measures specifically designed to regulate matters other than those dealt with in the Covenant but which may adversely affect rights recognized in the Covenant. One example, among others, is the degree to which immigration laws which distinguish between a male and a female citizen may or may not adversely affect the scope of the right of the woman to marriage to non-citizens or to hold public office.

4. The Committee, therefore, considers that it might assist States parties if special attention were given to a review by specially appointed bodies or institutions of laws or measures which inherently draw a distinction between men and women in so far as those laws or measures adversely affect the rights provided for in the Covenant and, secondly, that States parties should give specific information in their reports about all measures, legislative or otherwise, designed to implement their undertaking under this article.

5. The Committee considers that it might help the States parties in implementing this obligation, if more use could be made of existing means of international cooperation with a view to exchanging experience and organizing assistance in solving the practical problems connected with the insurance of equal rights for men and women.

GENERAL COMMENT 5 Article 4 (Thirteenth session, 1981)

1. Article 4 of the Covenant has posed a number of problems for the Committee when considering reports from some States parties. When a public emergency which threatens the life of a nation arises and it is officially proclaimed, a State party may derogate from a number of rights to the extent strictly required by the situation. The State party, however, may not derogate from certain specific rights and may not take discriminatory measures on a number of grounds. The State party is also under an obligation to inform the other States parties immediately, through the Secretary-General, of the derogations it has made including the reasons therefor and the date on which the derogations are terminated.

2. States parties have generally indicated the mechanism provided in their legal systems for the declaration of a state of emergency and the applicable provisions of the law governing derogations. However, in the case of a few States which had apparently derogated from Covenant rights, it was unclear not only whether a state of emergency had been officially declared but also whether rights from which the Covenant allows no derogation had in fact not been derogated from and further whether the other States parties had been informed of the derogations and of the reasons for the derogations.

3. The Committee holds the view that measures taken under article 4 are of an exceptional and temporary nature and may only last as long as the life of the nation concerned is threatened and that, in times of emergency, the protection of human rights becomes all the more important, particularly those rights from which no derogations can be made. The Committee also considers that it is equally important for States parties, in times of public emergency, to inform the other States parties of the nature and extent of the derogations they have made and of the reasons therefor and, further, to fulfil their reporting obligations under article 40 of the Covenant by indicating the nature and extent of each right derogated from together with the relevant documentation.

GENERAL COMMENT 6 Article 6 (Sixteenth session, 1982)

1. The right to life enunciated in article 6 of the Covenant has been dealt with in all State reports. It is the supreme right from which no derogation is permitted even in time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation (art. 4). However, the Committee has noted that quite often the information given concerning article 6 was limited to only one or other aspect of this right. It is a right which should not be interpreted narrowly.

2. The Committee observes that war and other acts of mass violence continue to be a scourge of humanity and take the lives of thousands of innocent human beings every year. Under the Charter of the United Nations the threat or use of force by any State against another State, except in exercise of the inherent right of self-defence, is already prohibited. The Committee considers that States have the supreme duty to prevent wars, acts of genocide and other acts of mass violence causing arbitrary loss of life. Every effort they make to avert the danger of war, especially thermonuclear war, and to strengthen international peace and security would constitute the most important condition and guarantee for the safeguarding of the right to life. In this respect, the Committee notes, in particular, a connection between article 6 and article 20, which states that the law shall prohibit any propaganda for war (para. 1) or incitement to violence (para. 2) as therein described.

3. The protection against arbitrary deprivation of life which is explicitly required by the third sentence of article 6 (1) is of paramount importance. The Committee considers that States parties should take measures not only to prevent and punish deprivation of life by criminal acts, but also to prevent arbitrary killing by their own security forces. The deprivation of life by the authorities of the State is a matter of the utmost gravity. Therefore, the law must strictly control and limit the circumstances in which a person may be deprived of his life by such authorities.

4. States parties should also take specific and effective measures to prevent the disappearance of individuals, something which unfortunately has become all too frequent and leads too often to arbitrary deprivation of life. Furthermore, States should establish effective facilities and procedures to investigate thoroughly cases of missing and disappeared persons in circumstances which may involve a violation of the right to life.

5. Moreover, the Committee has noted that the right to life has been too often narrowly interpreted. The expression "inherent right to life" cannot properly be understood in a restrictive manner, and the protection of this right requires that States adopt positive measures. In this connection, the Committee considers that it would be desirable for States parties to take all possible measures to reduce infant mortality and to increase life expectancy, especially in adopting measures to eliminate malnutrition and epidemics.

6. While it follows from article 6 (2) to (6) that States parties are not obliged to abolish the death penalty totally they are obliged to limit its use and, in particular, to abolish it for other than the "most serious crimes". Accordingly, they ought to consider reviewing their criminal laws in this light and, in any event, are obliged to restrict the application of the death penalty to the "most serious crimes". The article also refers generally to abolition in terms which strongly suggest (paras. 2 (2) and (6)) that abolition is desirable. The Committee concludes that all measures of abolition should be considered as progress in the enjoyment of the right to life within the meaning of article 40, and should as such be reported to the Committee. The Committee notes that a number of States have already abolished the death penalty or suspended its application. Nevertheless, States' reports show that progress made towards abolishing or limiting the application of the death penalty is quite inadequate.

7. The Committee is of the opinion that the expression "most serious crimes" must be read restrictively to mean that the death penalty should be a quite exceptional measure. It also follows from the express terms of article 6 that it can only be imposed in accordance with the law in force at the time of the commission of the crime and not contrary to the Covenant. The procedural guarantees therein prescribed must be observed, including the right to a fair hearing by an independent tribunal, the presumption of innocence, the minimum guarantees for the defence, and the right to review by a higher tribunal. These rights are applicable in addition to the particular right to seek pardon or commutation of the sentence.

GENERAL COMMENT 7 Article 7 (Sixteenth session, 1982)*

1. In examining the reports of States parties, members of the Committee have often asked for further information under article 7 which prohibits, in the first place, torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. The Committee recalls that even in situations of public emergency such as are envisaged by article 4 (1) this provision is non-derogable under article 4 (2). Its purpose is to protect the integrity and dignity of the individual. The Committee notes that it is not sufficient for the implementation of this article to prohibit such treatment or punishment or to make it a crime. Most States have penal provisions which are applicable to cases of torture or similar practices. Because such cases nevertheless occur, it follows from article 7, read together with article 2 of the Covenant, that States must ensure an effective protection through some machinery of control.

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* General Comment 7 was replaced by General Comment 20 (Forty-fourth session, 1992).

Complaints about ill-treatment must be investigated effectively by competent authorities. Those found guilty must be held responsible, and the alleged victims must themselves have effective remedies at their disposal, including the right to obtain compensation. Among the safeguards which may make control effective are provisions against detention incommunicado, granting, without prejudice to the investigation, persons such as doctors, lawyers and family members access to the detainees; provisions requiring that detainees should be held in places that are publicly recognized and that their names and places of detention should be entered in a central register available to persons concerned, such as relatives; provisions making confessions or other evidence obtained through torture or other treatment contrary to article 7 inadmissible in court; and measures of training and instruction of law enforcement officials not to apply such treatment.

2. As appears from the terms of this article, the scope of protection required goes far beyond torture as normally understood. It may not be necessary to draw sharp distinctions between the various prohibited forms of treatment or punishment. These distinctions depend on the kind, purpose and severity of the particular treatment. In the view of the Committee the prohibition must extend to corporal punishment, including excessive chastisement as an educational or disciplinary measure. Even such a measure as solitary confinement may, according to the circumstances, and especially when the person is kept incommunicado, be contrary to this article. Moreover, the article clearly protects not only persons arrested or imprisoned, but also pupils and patients in educational and medical institutions. Finally, it is also the duty of public authorities to ensure protection by the law against such treatment even when committed by persons acting outside or without any official authority. For all persons deprived of their liberty, the prohibition of treatment contrary to article 7 is supplemented by the positive requirement of article 10 (1) of the Covenant that they shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person.

3. In particular, the prohibition extends to medical or scientific experimentation without the free consent of the person concerned (art. 7, second sentence). The Committee notes that the reports of States parties have generally given little or no information on this point. It takes the view that at least in countries where science and medicine are highly developed, and even for peoples and areas outside their borders if affected by their experiments, more attention should be given to the possible need and means to ensure the observance of this provision. Special protection in regard to such experiments is necessary in the case of persons not capable of giving their consent.

GENERAL COMMENT 8 Article 9 (Sixteenth session, 1982)

1. Article 9 which deals with the right to liberty and security of persons has often been somewhat narrowly understood in reports by States parties, and they have therefore given incomplete information. The Committee points out that paragraph 1 is applicable to all deprivations of liberty, whether in criminal cases or in other cases such as, for example, mental illness, vagrancy, drug addiction, educational purposes, immigration control, etc. It is true that some of the provisions of article 9 (part of para. 2 and the whole of para. 3) are only applicable to persons against whom criminal charges

are brought. But the rest, and in particular the important guarantee laid down in paragraph 4, i.e. the right to control by a court of the legality of the detention, applies to all persons deprived of their liberty by arrest or detention. Furthermore, States parties have in accordance with article 2 (3) also to ensure that an effective remedy is provided in other cases in which an individual claims to be deprived of his liberty in violation of the Covenant.

2. Paragraph 3 of article 9 requires that in criminal cases any person arrested or detained has to be brought "promptly" before a judge or other officer authorized by law to exercise judicial power. More precise time-limits are fixed by law in most States parties and, in the view of the Committee, delays must not exceed a few days. Many States have given insufficient information about the actual practices in this respect.

3. Another matter is the total length of detention pending trial. In certain categories of criminal cases in some countries this matter has caused some concern within the Committee, and members have questioned whether their practices have been in conformity with the entitlement "to trial within a reasonable time or to release" under paragraph 3. Pre-trial detention should be an exception and as short as possible. The Committee would welcome information concerning mechanisms existing and measures taken with a view to reducing the duration of such detention.

4. Also if so-called preventive detention is used, for reasons of public security, it must be controlled by these same provisions, i.e. it must not be arbitrary, and must be based on grounds and procedures established by law (para. 1), information of the reasons must be given (para. 2) and court control of the detention must be available (para. 4) as well as compensation in the case of a breach (para. 5). And if, in addition, criminal charges are brought in such cases, the full protection of article 9 (2) and (3), as well as article 14, must also be granted.

GENERAL COMMENT 9 Article 10 (Sixteenth session, 1982)*

1. Article 10, paragraph 1 of the Covenant provides that all persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person. However, by no means all the reports submitted by States parties have contained information on the way in which this paragraph of the article is being implemented. The Committee is of the opinion that it would be desirable for the reports of States parties to contain specific information on the legal measures designed to protect that right. The Committee also considers that reports should indicate the concrete measures being taken by the competent State organs to monitor the mandatory implementation of national legislation concerning the humane treatment and respect for the human dignity of all persons deprived of their liberty that paragraph 1 requires.

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* General Comment 9 was replaced by General Comment 21 (Forty-fourth session, 1992).

The Committee notes, in particular, that paragraph 1 of this article is generally applicable to persons deprived of their liberty, whereas paragraph 2 deals with accused as distinct from convicted persons, and paragraph 3 with convicted persons only. This structure quite often is not reflected in the reports, which mainly have related to accused and convicted persons. The wording of paragraph 1, its context - especially its proximity to article 9, paragraph 1, which also deals with all deprivations of liberty - and its purpose support a broad application of the principle expressed in that provision. Moreover, the Committee recalls that this article supplements article 7 as regards the treatment of all persons deprived of their liberty.

The humane treatment and the respect for the dignity of all persons deprived of their liberty is a basic standard of universal application which cannot depend entirely on material resources. While the Committee is aware that in other respects the modalities and conditions of detention may vary with the available resources, they must always be applied without discrimination, as required by article 2 (1).

Ultimate responsibility for the observance of this principle rests with the State as regards all institutions where persons are lawfully held against their will, not only in prisons but also, for example, hospitals, detention camps or correctional institutions.

2. Subparagraph 2 (a) of the article provides that, save in exceptional circumstances, accused persons shall be segregated from convicted persons and shall receive separate treatment appropriate to their status as unconvicted persons. Some reports have failed to pay proper attention to this direct requirement of the Covenant and, as a result, to provide adequate information on the way in which the treatment of accused persons differs from that of convicted persons. Such information should be included in future reports.

Subparagraph 2 (b) of the article calls, inter alia, for accused juvenile persons to be separated from adults. The information in reports shows that a number of States are not taking sufficient account of the fact that this is an unconditional requirement of the Covenant. It is the Committee's opinion that, as is clear from the text of the Covenant, deviation from States parties' obligations under subparagraph 2 (b) cannot be justified by any consideration whatsoever.

3. In a number of cases, the information appearing in reports with respect to paragraph 3 of the article has contained no concrete mention either of legislative or administrative measures or of practical steps to promote the reformation and social rehabilitation of prisoners, by, for example, education, vocational training and useful work. Allowing visits, in particular by family members, is normally also such a measure which is required for reasons of humanity. There are also similar lacunae in the reports of certain States with respect to information concerning juvenile offenders, who must be segregated from adults and given treatment appropriate to their age and legal status.

4. The Committee further notes that the principles of humane treatment and respect for human dignity set out in paragraph 1 are the basis for the more specific and limited obligations of States in the field of criminal justice set out in paragraphs 2 and 3 of article 10. The segregation of accused persons from convicted ones is required in order to emphasize their status as unconvicted persons who are at the same time protected by the presumption of innocence stated in article 14, paragraph 2. The aim of these provisions is to protect the groups mentioned, and the requirements contained therein should be seen in that light. Thus, for example, the segregation and treatment of juvenile offenders should be provided for in such a way that it promotes their reformation and social rehabilitation.

GENERAL COMMENT 10 Article 19 (Nineteenth session, 1983)

1. Paragraph 1 requires protection of the "right to hold opinions without interference". This is a right to which the Covenant permits no exception or restriction. The Committee would welcome information from States parties concerning paragraph 1.

2. Paragraph 2 requires protection of the right to freedom of expression, which includes not only freedom to "impart information and ideas of all kinds", but also freedom to "seek" and "receive" them "regardless of frontiers" and in whatever medium, "either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice". Not all States parties have provided information concerning all aspects of the freedom of expression. For instance, little attention has so far been given to the fact that, because of the development of modern mass media, effective measures are necessary to prevent such control of the media as would interfere with the right of everyone to freedom of expression in a way that is not provided for in paragraph 3.

3. Many State reports confine themselves to mentioning that freedom of expression is guaranteed under the Constitution or the law. However, in order to know the precise regime of freedom of expression in law and in practice, the Committee needs in addition pertinent information about the rules which either define the scope of freedom of expression or which set forth certain restrictions, as well as any other conditions which in practice affect the exercise of this right. It is the interplay between the principle of freedom of expression and such limitations and restrictions which determines the actual scope of the individual's right.

4. Paragraph 3 expressly stresses that the exercise of the right to freedom of expression carries with it special duties and responsibilities and for this reason certain restrictions on the right are permitted which may relate either to the interests of other persons or to those of the community as a whole. However, when a State party imposes certain restrictions on the exercise of freedom of expression, these may not put in jeopardy the right itself. Paragraph 3 lays down conditions and it is only subject to these conditions that restrictions may be imposed: the restrictions must be "provided by law"; they may only be imposed for one of the purposes set out in subparagraphs (a) and (b) of paragraph 3; and they must be justified as being "necessary" for that State party for one of those purposes.

GENERAL COMMENT 11 Article 20 (Nineteenth session, 1983)

1. Not all reports submitted by States parties have provided sufficient information as to the implementation of article 20 of the Covenant. In view of the nature of article 20, States parties are obliged to adopt the necessary legislative measures prohibiting the actions referred to therein. However, the reports have shown that in some States such actions are neither prohibited by law nor are appropriate efforts intended or made to prohibit them. Furthermore, many reports failed to give sufficient information concerning the relevant national legislation and practice.

2. Article 20 of the Covenant states that any propaganda for war and any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law. In the opinion of the Committee, these required prohibitions are fully compatible with the right of freedom of expression as contained in article 19, the exercise of which carries with it special duties and responsibilities. The prohibition under paragraph 1 extends to all forms of propaganda threatening or resulting in an act of aggression or breach of the peace contrary to the Charter of the United Nations, while paragraph 2 is directed against any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence, whether such propaganda or advocacy has aims which are internal or external to the State concerned. The provisions of article 20, paragraph 1, do not prohibit advocacy of the sovereign right of self-defence or the right of peoples to self-determination and independence in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. For article 20 to become fully effective there ought to be a law making it clear that propaganda and advocacy as described therein are contrary to public policy and providing for an appropriate sanction in case of violation. The Committee, therefore, believes that States parties which have not yet done so should take the measures necessary to fulfil the obligations contained in article 20, and should themselves refrain from any such propaganda or advocacy.

GENERAL COMMENT 12 Article 1 (Twenty-first session, 1984)

1. In accordance with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognizes that all peoples have the right of self-determination. The right of self-determination is of particular importance because its realization is an essential condition for the effective guarantee and observance of individual human rights and for the promotion and strengthening of those rights. It is for that reason that States set forth the right of self-determination in a provision of positive law in both Covenants and placed this provision as article 1 apart from and before all of the other rights in the two Covenants.

2. Article 1 enshrines an inalienable right of all peoples as described in its paragraphs 1 and 2. By virtue of that right they freely "determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development". The article imposes on all States parties corresponding obligations. This right and the corresponding obligations concerning its implementation are interrelated with other provisions of the Covenant and rules of international law.

3. Although the reporting obligations of all States parties include article 1, only some reports give detailed explanations regarding each of its paragraphs. The Committee has noted that many of them completely ignore article 1, provide inadequate information in regard to it or confine themselves to a reference to election laws. The Committee considers it highly desirable that States parties' reports should contain information on each paragraph of article 1.

4. With regard to paragraph 1 of article 1, States parties should describe the constitutional and political processes which in practice allow the exercise of this right.

5. Paragraph 2 affirms a particular aspect of the economic content of the right of self-determination, namely the right of peoples, for their own ends, freely to "dispose of their natural wealth and resources without prejudice to any obligations arising out of international economic cooperation, based upon the principle of mutual benefit, and international law. In no case may a people be deprived of its own means of subsistence". This right entails corresponding duties for all States and the international community. States should indicate any factors or difficulties which prevent the free disposal of their natural wealth and resources contrary to the provisions of this paragraph and to what extent that affects the enjoyment of other rights set forth in the Covenant.

6. Paragraph 3, in the Committee's opinion, is particularly important in that it imposes specific obligations on States parties, not only in relation to their own peoples but vis-à-vis all peoples which have not been able to exercise or have been deprived of the possibility of exercising their right to self-determination. The general nature of this paragraph is confirmed by its drafting history. It stipulates that "The States Parties to the present Covenant, including those having responsibility for the administration of Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories, shall promote the realization of the right of self-determination, and shall respect that right, in conformity with the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations". The obligations exist irrespective of whether a people entitled to self-determination depends on a State party to the Covenant or not. It follows that all States parties to the Covenant should take positive action to facilitate realization of and respect for the right of peoples to self-determination. Such positive action must be consistent with the States' obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and under international law: in particular, States must refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of other States and thereby adversely affecting the exercise of the right to self-determination. The reports should contain information on the performance of these obligations and the measures taken to that end.

7. In connection with article 1 of the Covenant, the Committee refers to other international instruments concerning the right of all peoples to self-determination, in particular the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, adopted by the General Assembly on 24 October 1970 (General Assembly resolution 2625 (XXV)).

8. The Committee considers that history has proved that the realization of and respect for the right of self-determination of peoples contributes to the establishment of friendly relations and cooperation between States and to strengthening international peace and understanding.

GENERAL COMMENT 13 Article 14 (Twenty-first session, 1984)

1. The Committee notes that article 14 of the Covenant is of a complex nature and that different aspects of its provisions will need specific comments. All of these provisions are aimed at ensuring the proper administration of justice, and to this end uphold a series of individual rights such as equality before the courts and tribunals and the right to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Not all reports provided details on the legislative or other measures adopted specifically to implement each of the provisions of article 14.

2. In general, the reports of States parties fail to recognize that article 14 applies not only to procedures for the determination of criminal charges against individuals but also to procedures to determine their rights and obligations in a suit at law. Laws and practices dealing with these matters vary widely from State to State. This diversity makes it all the more necessary for States parties to provide all relevant information and to explain in greater detail how the concepts of "criminal charge" and "rights and obligations in a suit at law" are interpreted in relation to their respective legal systems.

3. The Committee would find it useful if, in their future reports, States parties could provide more detailed information on the steps taken to ensure that equality before the courts, including equal access to courts, fair and public hearings and competence, impartiality and independence of the judiciary are established by law and guaranteed in practice. In particular, States parties should specify the relevant constitutional and legislative texts which provide for the establishment of the courts and ensure that they are independent, impartial and competent, in particular with regard to the manner in which judges are appointed, the qualifications for appointment, and the duration of their terms of office; the condition governing promotion, transfer and cessation of their functions and the actual independence of the judiciary from the executive branch and the legislative.

4. The provisions of article 14 apply to all courts and tribunals within the scope of that article whether ordinary or specialized. The Committee notes the existence, in many countries, of military or special courts which try civilians. This could present serious problems as far as the equitable, impartial and independent administration of justice is concerned. Quite often the reason for the establishment of such courts is to enable exceptional procedures to be applied which do not comply with normal standards of justice. While the Covenant does not prohibit such categories of courts, nevertheless the conditions which it lays down clearly indicate that the trying of civilians by such courts should be very exceptional and take place under conditions which genuinely afford the full guarantees stipulated in article 14. The Committee has noted a serious lack of information in this

regard in the reports of some States parties whose judicial institutions include such courts for the trying of civilians. In some countries such military and special courts do not afford the strict guarantees of the proper administration of justice in accordance with the requirements of article 14 which are essential for the effective protection of human rights. If States parties decide in circumstances of a public emergency as contemplated by article 4 to derogate from normal procedures required under article 14, they should ensure that such derogations do not exceed those strictly required by the exigencies of the actual situation, and respect the other conditions in paragraph 1 of article 14.

5. The second sentence of article 14, paragraph 1, provides that "everyone shall be entitled to a fair and public hearing". Paragraph 3 of the article elaborates on the requirements of a "fair hearing" in regard to the determination of criminal charges. However, the requirements of paragraph 3 are minimum guarantees, the observance of which is not always sufficient to ensure the fairness of a hearing as required by paragraph 1.

6. The publicity of hearings is an important safeguard in the interest of the individual and of society at large. At the same time article 14, paragraph 1, acknowledges that courts have the power to exclude all or part of the public for reasons spelt out in that paragraph. It should be noted that, apart from such exceptional circumstances, the Committee considers that a hearing must be open to the public in general, including members of the press, and must not, for instance, be limited only to a particular category of persons. It should be noted that, even in cases in which the public is excluded from the trial, the judgement must, with certain strictly defined exceptions, be made public.

7. The Committee has noted a lack of information regarding article 14, paragraph 2 and, in some cases, has even observed that the presumption of innocence, which is fundamental to the protection of human rights, is expressed in very ambiguous terms or entails conditions which render it ineffective. By reason of the presumption of innocence, the burden of proof of the charge is on the prosecution and the accused has the benefit of doubt. No guilt can be presumed until the charge has been proved beyond reasonable doubt. Further, the presumption of innocence implies a right to be treated in accordance with this principle. It is, therefore, a duty for all public authorities to refrain from prejudging the outcome of a trial.

8. Among the minimum guarantees in criminal proceedings prescribed by paragraph 3, the first concerns the right of everyone to be informed in a language which he understands of the charge against him (subpara. (a)). The Committee notes that State reports often do not explain how this right is respected and ensured. Article 14 (3) (a) applies to all cases of criminal charges, including those of persons not in detention. The Committee notes further that the right to be informed of the charge "promptly" requires that information is given in the manner described as soon as the charge is first made by a competent authority. In the opinion of the Committee this right must arise when in the course of an investigation a court or an authority of the prosecution decides to take procedural steps against a person suspected of a crime or publicly names him as such. The specific requirements of

subparagraph 3 (a) may be met by stating the charge either orally or in writing, provided that the information indicates both the law and the alleged facts on which it is based.

9. Subparagraph 3 (b) provides that the accused must have adequate time and facilities for the preparation of his defence and to communicate with counsel of his own choosing. What is "adequate time" depends on the circumstances of each case, but the facilities must include access to documents and other evidence which the accused requires to prepare his case, as well as the opportunity to engage and communicate with counsel. When the accused does not want to defend himself in person or request a person or an association of his choice, he should be able to have recourse to a lawyer. Furthermore, this subparagraph requires counsel to communicate with the accused in conditions giving full respect for the confidentiality of their communications. Lawyers should be able to counsel and to represent their clients in accordance with their established professional standards and judgement without any restrictions, influences, pressures or undue interference from any quarter.

10. Subparagraph 3 (c) provides that the accused shall be tried without undue delay. This guarantee relates not only to the time by which a trial should commence, but also the time by which it should end and judgement be rendered; all stages must take place "without undue delay". To make this right effective, a procedure must be available in order to ensure that the trial will proceed "without undue delay", both in first instance and on appeal.

11. Not all reports have dealt with all aspects of the right of defence as defined in subparagraph 3 (d). The Committee has not always received sufficient information concerning the protection of the right of the accused to be present during the determination of any charge against him nor how the legal system assures his right either to defend himself in person or to be assisted by counsel of his own choosing, or what arrangements are made if a person does not have sufficient means to pay for legal assistance. The accused or his lawyer must have the right to act diligently and fearlessly in pursuing all available defences and the right to challenge the conduct of the case if they believe it to be unfair. When exceptionally for justified reasons trials in absentia are held, strict observance of the rights of the defence is all the more necessary.

12. Subparagraph 3 (e) states that the accused shall be entitled to examine or have examined the witnesses against him and to obtain the attendance and examination of witnesses on his behalf under the same conditions as witnesses against him. This provision is designed to guarantee to the accused the same legal powers of compelling the attendance of witnesses and of examining or cross-examining any witnesses as are available to the prosecution.

13. Subparagraph 3 (f) provides that if the accused cannot understand or speak the language used in court he is entitled to the assistance of an interpreter free of any charge. This right is independent of the outcome of the proceedings and applies to aliens as well as to nationals. It is of basic importance in cases in which ignorance of the language used by a court or difficulty in understanding may constitute a major obstacle to the right of defence.

14. Subparagraph 3 (g) provides that the accused may not be compelled to testify against himself or to confess guilt. In considering this safeguard the provisions of article 7 and article 10, paragraph 1, should be borne in mind. In order to compel the accused to confess or to testify against himself, frequently methods which violate these provisions are used. The law should require that evidence provided by means of such methods or any other form of compulsion is wholly unacceptable.

15. In order to safeguard the rights of the accused under paragraphs 1 and 3 of article 14, judges should have authority to consider any allegations made of violations of the rights of the accused during any stage of the prosecution.

16. Article 14, paragraph 4, provides that in the case of juvenile persons, the procedure shall be such as will take account of their age and the desirability of promoting their rehabilitation. Not many reports have furnished sufficient information concerning such relevant matters as the minimum age at which a juvenile may be charged with a criminal offence, the maximum age at which a person is still considered to be a juvenile, the existence of special courts and procedures, the laws governing procedures against juveniles and how all these special arrangements for juveniles take account of "the desirability of promoting their rehabilitation". Juveniles are to enjoy at least the same guarantees and protection as are accorded to adults under article 14.

17. Article 14, paragraph 5, provides that everyone convicted of a crime shall have the right to his conviction and sentence being reviewed by a higher tribunal according to law. Particular attention is drawn to the other language versions of the word "crime" ("infraction", "delito", "prestuplenie") which show that the guarantee is not confined only to the most serious offences. In this connection, not enough information has been provided concerning the procedures of appeal, in particular the access to and the powers of reviewing tribunals, what requirements must be satisfied to appeal against a judgement, and the way in which the procedures before review tribunals take account of the fair and public hearing requirements of paragraph 1 of article 14.

18. Article 14, paragraph 6, provides for compensation according to law in certain cases of a miscarriage of justice as described therein. It seems from many State reports that this right is often not observed or insufficiently guaranteed by domestic legislation. States should, where necessary, supplement their legislation in this area in order to bring it into line with the provisions of the Covenant.

19. In considering State reports differing views have often been expressed as to the scope of paragraph 7 of article 14. Some States parties have even felt the need to make reservations in relation to procedures for the resumption of criminal cases. It seems to the Committee that most States parties make a clear distinction between a resumption of a trial justified by exceptional circumstances and a re-trial prohibited pursuant to the principle of ne bis in idem as contained in paragraph 7. This understanding of the meaning of ne bis in idem may encourage States parties to reconsider their reservations to article 14, paragraph 7.

GENERAL COMMENT 14 Article 6 (Twenty-third session, 1984)

1. In its general comment 6 [16] adopted at its 378th meeting on 27 July 1982, the Human Rights Committee observed that the right to life enunciated in the first paragraph of article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is the supreme right from which no derogation is permitted even in time of public emergency. The same right to life is enshrined in article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10 December 1948. It is basic to all human rights.

2. In its previous general comment, the Committee also observed that it is the supreme duty of States to prevent wars. War and other acts of mass violence continue to be a scourge of humanity and take the lives of thousands of innocent human beings every year.

3. While remaining deeply concerned by the toll of human life taken by conventional weapons in armed conflicts, the Committee has noted that, during successive sessions of the General Assembly, representatives from all geographical regions have expressed their growing concern at the development and proliferation of increasingly awesome weapons of mass destruction, which not only threaten human life but also absorb resources that could otherwise be used for vital economic and social purposes, particularly for the benefit of developing countries, and thereby for promoting and securing the enjoyment of human rights for all.

4. The Committee associates itself with this concern. It is evident that the designing, testing, manufacture, possession and deployment of nuclear weapons are among the greatest threats to the right to life which confront mankind today. This threat is compounded by the danger that the actual use of such weapons may be brought about, not only in the event of war, but even through human or mechanical error or failure.

5. Furthermore, the very existence and gravity of this threat generates a climate of suspicion and fear between States, which is in itself antagonistic to the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the International Covenants on Human Rights.

6. The production, testing, possession, deployment and use of nuclear weapons should be prohibited and recognized as crimes against humanity.

7. The Committee accordingly, in the interest of mankind, calls upon all States, whether Parties to the Covenant or not, to take urgent steps, unilaterally and by agreement, to rid the world of this menace.

GENERAL COMMENT 15 Twenty-seventh session, 1986

The position of aliens under the Covenant

1. Reports from States parties have often failed to take into account that each State party must ensure the rights in the Covenant to "all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction" (art. 2, para. 1).

In general, the rights set forth in the Covenant apply to everyone, irrespective of reciprocity, and irrespective of his or her nationality or statelessness.

2. Thus, the general rule is that each one of the rights of the Covenant must be guaranteed without discrimination between citizens and aliens. Aliens receive the benefit of the general requirement of non-discrimination in respect of the rights guaranteed in the Covenant, as provided for in article 2 thereof. This guarantee applies to aliens and citizens alike. Exceptionally, some of the rights recognized in the Covenant are expressly applicable only to citizens (art. 25), while article 13 applies only to aliens. However, the Committee's experience in examining reports shows that in a number of countries other rights that aliens should enjoy under the Covenant are denied to them or are subject to limitations that cannot always be justified under the Covenant.

3. A few constitutions provide for equality of aliens with citizens. Some constitutions adopted more recently carefully distinguish fundamental rights that apply to all and those granted to citizens only, and deal with each in detail. In many States, however, the constitutions are drafted in terms of citizens only when granting relevant rights. Legislation and case law may also play an important part in providing for the rights of aliens. The Committee has been informed that in some States fundamental rights, though not guaranteed to aliens by the Constitution or other legislation, will also be extended to them as required by the Covenant. In certain cases, however, there has clearly been a failure to implement Covenant rights without discrimination in respect of aliens.

4. The Committee considers that in their reports States parties should give attention to the position of aliens, both under their law and in actual practice. The Covenant gives aliens all the protection regarding rights guaranteed therein, and its requirements should be observed by States parties in their legislation and in practice as appropriate. The position of aliens would thus be considerably improved. States parties should ensure that the provisions of the Covenant and the rights under it are made known to aliens within their jurisdiction.

5. The Covenant does not recognize the right of aliens to enter or reside in the territory of a State party. It is in principle a matter for the State to decide who it will admit to its territory. However, in certain circumstances an alien may enjoy the protection of the Covenant even in relation to entry or residence, for example, when considerations of non-discrimination, prohibition of inhuman treatment and respect for family life arise.

6. Consent for entry may be given subject to conditions relating, for example, to movement, residence and employment. A State may also impose general conditions upon an alien who is in transit. However, once aliens are allowed to enter the territory of a State party they are entitled to the rights set out in the Covenant.

7. Aliens thus have an inherent right to life, protected by law, and may not be arbitrarily deprived of life. They must not be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; nor may they be held in

slavery or servitude. Aliens have the full right to liberty and security of the person. If lawfully deprived of their liberty, they shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of their person. Aliens may not be imprisoned for failure to fulfil a contractual obligation. They have the right to liberty of movement and free choice of residence; they shall be free to leave the country. Aliens shall be equal before the courts and tribunals, and shall be entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law in the determination of any criminal charge or of rights and obligations in a suit at law. Aliens shall not be subjected to retrospective penal legislation, and are entitled to recognition before the law. They may not be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy, family, home or correspondence. They have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and the right to hold opinions and to express them. Aliens receive the benefit of the right of peaceful assembly and of freedom of association. They may marry when at marriageable age. Their children are entitled to those measures of protection required by their status as minors. In those cases where aliens constitute a minority within the meaning of article 27, they shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion and to use their own language. Aliens are entitled to equal protection by the law. There shall be no discrimination between aliens and citizens in the application of these rights. These rights of aliens may be qualified only by such limitations as may be lawfully imposed under the Covenant.

8. Once an alien is lawfully within a territory, his freedom of movement within the territory and his right to leave that territory may only be restricted in accordance with article 12, paragraph 3. Differences in treatment in this regard between aliens and nationals, or between different categories of aliens, need to be justified under article 12, paragraph 3. Since such restrictions must, inter alia, be consistent with the other rights recognized in the Covenant, a State party cannot, by restraining an alien or deporting him to a third country, arbitrarily prevent his return to his own country (art. 12, para. 4).

9. Many reports have given insufficient information on matters relevant to article 13. That article is applicable to all procedures aimed at the obligatory departure of an alien, whether described in national law as expulsion or otherwise. If such procedures entail arrest, the safeguards of the Covenant relating to deprivation of liberty (arts. 9 and 10) may also be applicable. If the arrest is for the particular purpose of extradition, other provisions of national and international law may apply. Normally an alien who is expelled must be allowed to leave for any country that agrees to take him. The particular rights of article 13 only protect those aliens who are lawfully in the territory of a State party. This means that national law concerning the requirements for entry and stay must be taken into account in determining the scope of that protection, and that illegal entrants and aliens who have stayed longer than the law or their permits allow, in particular, are not covered by its provisions. However, if the legality of an alien's entry or stay is in dispute, any decision on this point leading to his expulsion or deportation ought to be taken in accordance with article 13. It is for the competent authorities of the State party, in good faith and in the exercise of their powers, to apply and interpret the domestic law, observing, however, such requirements under the Covenant as equality before the law (art. 26).

10. Article 13 directly regulates only the procedure and not the substantive grounds for expulsion. However, by allowing only those carried out "in pursuance of a decision reached in accordance with law", its purpose is clearly to prevent arbitrary expulsions. On the other hand, it entitles each alien to a decision in his own case and, hence, article 13 would not be satisfied with laws or decisions providing for collective or mass expulsions. This understanding, in the opinion of the Committee, is confirmed by further provisions concerning the right to submit reasons against expulsion and to have the decision reviewed by and to be represented before the competent authority or someone designated by it. An alien must be given full facilities for pursuing his remedy against expulsion so that this right will in all the circumstances of his case be an effective one. The principles of article 13 relating to appeal against expulsion and the entitlement to review by a competent authority may only be departed from when "compelling reasons of national security" so require. Discrimination may not be made between different categories of aliens in the application of article 13.

GENERAL COMMENT 16 Article 17 (Thirty-second session, 1988)

1. Article 17 provides for the right of every person to be protected against arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence as well as against unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation. In the view of the Committee this right is required to be guaranteed against all such interferences and attacks whether they emanate from State authorities or from natural or legal persons. The obligations imposed by this article require the State to adopt legislative and other measures to give effect to the prohibition against such interferences and attacks as well as to the protection of this right.

2. In this connection, the Committee wishes to point out that in the reports of States parties to the Covenant the necessary attention is not being given to information concerning the manner in which respect for this right is guaranteed by legislative, administrative or judicial authorities, and in general by the competent organs established in the State. In particular, insufficient attention is paid to the fact that article 17 of the Covenant deals with protection against both unlawful and arbitrary interference. That means that it is precisely in State legislation above all that provision must be made for the protection of the right set forth in that article. At present the reports either say nothing about such legislation or provide insufficient information on the subject.

3. The term "unlawful" means that no interference can take place except in cases envisaged by the law. Interference authorized by States can only take place on the basis of law, which itself must comply with the provisions, aims and objectives of the Covenant.

4. The expression "arbitrary interference" is also relevant to the protection of the right provided for in article 17. In the Committee's view the expression "arbitrary interference" can also extend to interference provided for under the law. The introduction of the concept of arbitrariness is intended to guarantee that even interference provided for by law should be in accordance with the provisions, aims and objectives of the Covenant and should be, in any event, reasonable in the particular circumstances.

5. Regarding the term "family", the objectives of the Covenant require that for purposes of article 17 this term be given a broad interpretation to include all those comprising the family as understood in the society of the State party concerned. The term "home" in English, "manzel" in Arabic, "zhùzhái" in Chinese, "domicile" in French, "zhilische" in Russian and "domicilio" in Spanish, as used in article 17 of the Covenant, is to be understood to indicate the place where a person resides or carries out his usual occupation. In this connection, the Committee invites States to indicate in their reports the meaning given in their society to the terms "family" and "home".

6. The Committee considers that the reports should include information on the authorities and organs set up within the legal system of the State which are competent to authorize interference allowed by the law. It is also indispensable to have information on the authorities which are entitled to exercise control over such interference with strict regard for the law, and to know in what manner and through which organs persons concerned may complain of a violation of the right provided for in article 17 of the Covenant. States should in their reports make clear the extent to which actual practice conforms to the law. State party reports should also contain information on complaints lodged in respect of arbitrary or unlawful interference, and the number of any findings in that regard, as well as the remedies provided in such cases.

7. As all persons live in society, the protection of privacy is necessarily relative. However, the competent public authorities should only be able to call for such information relating to an individual's private life the knowledge of which is essential in the interests of society as understood under the Covenant. Accordingly, the Committee recommends that States should indicate in their reports the laws and regulations that govern authorized interferences with private life.

8. Even with regard to interferences that conform to the Covenant, relevant legislation must specify in detail the precise circumstances in which such interferences may be permitted. A decision to make use of such authorized interference must be made only by the authority designated under the law, and on a case-by-case basis. Compliance with article 17 requires that the integrity and confidentiality of correspondence should be guaranteed de jure and de facto. Correspondence should be delivered to the addressee without interception and without being opened or otherwise read. Surveillance, whether electronic or otherwise, interceptions of telephonic, telegraphic and other forms of communication, wire-tapping and recording of conversations should be prohibited. Searches of a person's home should be restricted to a search for necessary evidence and should not be allowed to amount to harassment. So far as personal and body search is concerned, effective measures should ensure that such searches are carried out in a manner consistent with the dignity of the person who is being searched. Persons being subjected to body search by State officials, or medical personnel acting at the request of the State, should only be examined by persons of the same sex.

9. States parties are under a duty themselves not to engage in interferences inconsistent with article 17 of the Covenant and to provide the legislative framework prohibiting such acts by natural or legal persons.

10. The gathering and holding of personal information on computers, data banks and other devices, whether by public authorities or private individuals or bodies, must be regulated by law. Effective measures have to be taken by States to ensure that information concerning a person's private life does not reach the hands of persons who are not authorized by law to receive, process and use it, and is never used for purposes incompatible with the Covenant. In order to have the most effective protection of his private life, every individual should have the right to ascertain in an intelligible form, whether, and if so, what personal data is stored in automatic data files, and for what purposes. Every individual should also be able to ascertain which public authorises or private individuals or bodies control or may control their files. If such files contain incorrect personal data or have been collected or processed contrary to the provisions of the law, every individual should have the right to request rectification or elimination.

11. Article 17 affords protection to personal honour and reputation and States are under an obligation to provide adequate legislation to that end. Provision must also be made for everyone effectively to be able to protect himself against any unlawful attacks that do occur and to have an effective remedy against those responsible. States parties should indicate in their reports to what extent the honour or reputation of individuals is protected by law and how this protection is achieved according to their legal system.

GENERAL COMMENT 17 Article 24 (Thirty-fifth session, 1989)

1. Article 24 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognizes the right of every child, without any discrimination, to receive from his family, society and the State the protection required by his status as a minor. Consequently, the implementation of this provision entails the adoption of special measures to protect children, in addition to the measures that States are required to take under article 2 to ensure that everyone enjoys the rights provided for in the Covenant. The reports submitted by States parties often seem to underestimate this obligation and supply inadequate information on the way in which children are afforded enjoyment of their right to a special protection.

2. In this connection, the Committee points out that the rights provided for in article 24 are not the only ones that the Covenant recognizes for children and that, as individuals, children benefit from all of the civil rights enunciated in the Covenant. In enunciating a right, some provisions of the Covenant expressly indicate to States measures to be adopted with a view to affording minors greater protection than adults. Thus, as far as the right to life is concerned, the death penalty cannot be imposed for crimes committed by persons under 18 years of age. Similarly, if lawfully deprived of their liberty, accused juvenile persons shall be separated from adults and are entitled to be brought as speedily as possible for adjudication; in turn, convicted juvenile offenders shall be subject to a penitentiary system that involves segregation from adults and is appropriate to their age and legal status, the aim being to foster reformation and social rehabilitation.

In other instances, children are protected by the possibility of the restriction - provided that such restriction is warranted - of a right recognized by the Covenant, such as the right to publicize a judgement in a suit at law or a criminal case, from which an exception may be made when the interest of the minor so requires.

3. In most cases, however, the measures to be adopted are not specified in the Covenant and it is for each State to determine them in the light of the protection needs of children in its territory and within its jurisdiction. The Committee notes in this regard that such measures, although intended primarily to ensure that children fully enjoy the other rights enunciated in the Covenant, may also be economic, social and cultural. For example, every possible economic and social measure should be taken to reduce infant mortality and to eradicate malnutrition among children and to prevent them from being subjected to acts of violence and cruel and inhuman treatment or from being exploited by means of forced labour or prostitution, or by their use in the illicit trafficking of narcotic drugs, or by any other means. In the cultural field, every possible measure should be taken to foster the development of their personality and to provide them with a level of education that will enable them to enjoy the rights recognized in the Covenant, particularly the right to freedom of opinion and expression. Moreover, the Committee wishes to draw the attention of States parties to the need to include in their reports information on measures adopted to ensure that children do not take a direct part in armed conflicts.

4. The right to special measures of protection belongs to every child because of his status as a minor. Nevertheless, the Covenant does not indicate the age at which he attains his majority. This is to be determined by each State party in the light of the relevant social and cultural conditions. In this respect, States should indicate in their reports the age at which the child attains his majority in civil matters and assumes criminal responsibility. States should also indicate the age at which a child is legally entitled to work and the age at which he is treated as an adult under labour law. States should further indicate the age at which a child is considered adult for the purposes of article 10, paragraphs 2 and 3. However, the Committee notes that the age for the above purposes should not be set unreasonably low and that in any case a State party cannot absolve itself from its obligations under the Covenant regarding persons under the age of 18, notwithstanding that they have reached the age of majority under domestic law.

5. The Covenant requires that children should be protected against discrimination on any grounds such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth. In this connection, the Committee notes that, whereas non-discrimination in the enjoyment of the rights provided for in the Covenant also stems, in the case of children, from article 2 and their equality before the law from article 26, the non-discrimination clause contained in article 24 relates specifically to the measures of protection referred to in that provision. Reports by States parties should indicate how legislation and practice ensure that measures of protection are aimed at removing all discrimination in every field, including inheritance, particularly as between children who are nationals and children who are aliens or as between legitimate children and children born out of wedlock.

6. Responsibility for guaranteeing children the necessary protection lies with the family, society and the State. Although the Covenant does not indicate how such responsibility is to be apportioned, it is primarily incumbent on the family, which is interpreted broadly to include all persons composing it in the society of the State party concerned, and particularly on the parents, to create conditions to promote the harmonious development of the child's personality and his enjoyment of the rights recognized in the Covenant. However, since it is quite common for the father and mother to be gainfully employed outside the home, reports by States parties should indicate how society, social institutions and the State are discharging their responsibility to assist the family in ensuring the protection of the child. Moreover, in cases where the parents and the family seriously fail in their duties, ill-treat or neglect the child, the State should intervene to restrict parental authority and the child may be separated from his family when circumstances so require. If the marriage is dissolved, steps should be taken, keeping in view the paramount interest of the children, to give them necessary protection and, so far as is possible, to guarantee personal relations with both parents. The Committee considers it useful that reports by States parties should provide information on the special measures of protection adopted to protect children who are abandoned or deprived of their family environment in order to enable them to develop in conditions that most closely resemble those characterizing the family environment.

7. Under article 24, paragraph 2, every child has the right to be registered immediately after birth and to have a name. In the Committee's opinion, this provision should be interpreted as being closely linked to the provision concerning the right to special measures of protection and it is designed to promote recognition of the child's legal personality. Providing for the right to have a name is of special importance in the case of children born out of wedlock. The main purpose of the obligation to register children after birth is to reduce the danger of abduction, sale of or traffic in children, or of other types of treatment that are incompatible with the enjoyment of the rights provided for in the Covenant. Reports by States parties should indicate in detail the measures that ensure the immediate registration of children born in their territory.

8. Special attention should also be paid, in the context of the protection to be granted to children, to the right of every child to acquire a nationality, as provided for in article 24, paragraph 3. While the purpose of this provision is to prevent a child from being afforded less protection by society and the State because he is stateless, it does not necessarily make it an obligation for States to give their nationality to every child born in their territory. However, States are required to adopt every appropriate measure, both internally and in cooperation with other States, to ensure that every child has a nationality when he is born. In this connection, no discrimination with regard to the acquisition of nationality should be admissible under internal law as between legitimate children and children born out of wedlock or of stateless parents or based on the nationality status of one or both of the parents. The measures adopted to ensure that children have a nationality should always be referred to in reports by States parties.

GENERAL COMMENT 18 Non-discrimination (Thirty-seventh session, 1989)

1. Non-discrimination, together with equality before the law and equal protection of the law without any discrimination, constitute a basic and general principle relating to the protection of human rights. Thus, article 2, paragraph 1, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights obligates each State party to respect and ensure to all persons within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the Covenant without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Article 26 not only entitles all persons to equality before the law as well as equal protection of the law but also prohibits any discrimination under the law and guarantees to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

2. Indeed, the principle of non-discrimination is so basic that article 3 obligates each State party to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of the rights set forth in the Covenant. While article 4, paragraph 1, allows States parties to take measures derogating from certain obligations under the Covenant in time of public emergency, the same article requires, inter alia, that those measures should not involve discrimination solely on the ground of race, colour, sex, language, religion or social origin. Furthermore, article 20, paragraph 2, obligates States parties to prohibit, by law, any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred which constitutes incitement to discrimination.

3. Because of their basic and general character, the principle of non-discrimination as well as that of equality before the law and equal protection of the law are sometimes expressly referred to in articles relating to particular categories of human rights. Article 14, paragraph 1, provides that all persons shall be equal before the courts and tribunals, and paragraph 3 of the same article provides that, in the determination of any criminal charge against him, everyone shall be entitled, in full equality, to the minimum guarantees enumerated in subparagraphs (a) to (g) of paragraph 3. Similarly, article 25 provides for the equal participation in public life of all citizens, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2.

4. It is for the States parties to determine appropriate measures to implement the relevant provisions. However, the Committee is to be informed about the nature of such measures and their conformity with the principles of non-discrimination and equality before the law and equal protection of the law.

5. The Committee wishes to draw the attention of States parties to the fact that the Covenant sometimes expressly requires them to take measures to guarantee the equality of rights of the persons concerned. For example, article 23, paragraph 4, stipulates that States parties shall take appropriate steps to ensure equality of rights as well as responsibilities of spouses as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. Such steps may take the form of legislative, administrative or other measures, but it is a positive duty of States parties to make certain that spouses have equal rights as

required by the Covenant. In relation to children, article 24 provides that all children, without any discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth, have the right to such measures of protection as are required by their status as minors, on the part of their family, society and the State.

6. The Committee notes that the Covenant neither defines the term "discrimination" nor indicates what constitutes discrimination. However, article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination provides that the term "racial discrimination" shall mean any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life. Similarly, article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provides that "discrimination against women" shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

7. While these conventions deal only with cases of discrimination on specific grounds, the Committee believes that the term "discrimination" as used in the Covenant should be understood to imply any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference which is based on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, and which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by all persons, on an equal footing, of all rights and freedoms.

8. The enjoyment of rights and freedoms on an equal footing, however, does not mean identical treatment in every instance. In this connection, the provisions of the Covenant are explicit. For example, article 6, paragraph 5, prohibits the death sentence from being imposed on persons below 18 years of age. The same paragraph prohibits that sentence from being carried out on pregnant women. Similarly, article 10, paragraph 3, requires the segregation of juvenile offenders from adults. Furthermore, article 25 guarantees certain political rights, differentiating on grounds of citizenship.

9. Reports of many States parties contain information regarding legislative as well as administrative measures and court decisions which relate to protection against discrimination in law, but they very often lack information which would reveal discrimination in fact. When reporting on articles 2 (1), 3 and 26 of the Covenant, States parties usually cite provisions of their constitution or equal opportunity laws with respect to equality of persons. While such information is of course useful, the Committee wishes to know if there remain any problems of discrimination in fact, which may be practised either by public authorities, by the community, or by private persons or bodies. The Committee wishes to be informed about legal provisions and administrative measures directed at diminishing or eliminating such discrimination.

10. The Committee also wishes to point out that the principle of equality sometimes requires States parties to take affirmative action in order to diminish or eliminate conditions which cause or help to perpetuate discrimination prohibited by the Covenant. For example, in a State where the general conditions of a certain part of the population prevent or impair their enjoyment of human rights, the State should take specific action to correct those conditions. Such action may involve granting for a time to the part of the population concerned certain preferential treatment in specific matters as compared with the rest of the population. However, as long as such action is needed to correct discrimination in fact, it is a case of legitimate differentiation under the Covenant.

11. Both article 2, paragraph 1, and article 26 enumerate grounds of discrimination such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. The Committee has observed that in a number of constitutions and laws not all the grounds on which discrimination is prohibited, as cited in article 2, paragraph 1, are enumerated. The Committee would therefore like to receive information from States parties as to the significance of such omissions.

12. While article 2 limits the scope of the rights to be protected against discrimination to those provided for in the Covenant, article 26 does not specify such limitations. That is to say, article 26 provides that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination, and that the law shall guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any of the enumerated grounds. In the view of the Committee, article 26 does not merely duplicate the guarantee already provided for in article 2 but provides in itself an autonomous right. It prohibits discrimination in law or in fact in any field regulated and protected by public authorities. Article 26 is therefore concerned with the obligations imposed on States parties in regard to their legislation and the application thereof. Thus, when legislation is adopted by a State party, it must comply with the requirement of article 26 that its content should not be discriminatory. In other words, the application of the principle of non-discrimination contained in article 26 is not limited to those rights which are provided for in the Covenant.

13. Finally, the Committee observes that not every differentiation of treatment will constitute discrimination, if the criteria for such differentiation are reasonable and objective and if the aim is to achieve a purpose which is legitimate under the Covenant.

GENERAL COMMENT 19 Article 23 (Thirty-ninth session, 1990)

1. Article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognizes that the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. Protection of the family and its members is also guaranteed, directly or indirectly, by other provisions of the Covenant. Thus, article 17 establishes a prohibition on arbitrary or unlawful interference with the family. In addition, article 24 of the Covenant specifically addresses the protection of the rights of the child, as such or as a member of a family.

In their reports, States parties often fail to give enough information on how the State and society are discharging their obligation to provide protection to the family and the persons composing it.

2. The Committee notes that the concept of the family may differ in some respects from State to State, and even from region to region within a State, and that it is therefore not possible to give the concept a standard definition. However, the Committee emphasizes that, when a group of persons is regarded as a family under the legislation and practice of a State, it must be given the protection referred to in article 23. Consequently, States parties should report on how the concept and scope of the family is construed or defined in their own society and legal system. Where diverse concepts of the family, "nuclear" and "extended", exist within a State, this should be indicated with an explanation of the degree of protection afforded to each. In view of the existence of various forms of family, such as unmarried couples and their children or single parents and their children, States parties should also indicate whether and to what extent such types of family and their members are recognized and protected by domestic law and practice.

3. Ensuring the protection provided for under article 23 of the Covenant requires that States parties should adopt legislative, administrative or other measures. States parties should provide detailed information concerning the nature of such measures and the means whereby their effective implementation is assured. In fact, since the Covenant also recognizes the right of the family to protection by society, States parties' reports should indicate how the necessary protection is granted to the family by the State and other social institutions, whether and to what extent the State gives financial or other support to the activities of such institutions, and how it ensures that these activities are compatible with the Covenant.

4. Article 23, paragraph 2, of the Covenant reaffirms the right of men and women of marriageable age to marry and to found a family. Paragraph 3 of the same article provides that no marriage shall be entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses. States parties' reports should indicate whether there are restrictions or impediments to the exercise of the right to marry based on special factors such as degree of kinship or mental incapacity. The Covenant does not establish a specific marriageable age either for men or for women, but that age should be such as to enable each of the intending spouses to give his or her free and full personal consent in a form and under conditions prescribed by law. In this connection, the Committee wishes to note that such legal provisions must be compatible with the full exercise of the other rights guaranteed by the Covenant; thus, for instance, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion implies that the legislation of each State should provide for the possibility of both religious and civil marriages. In the Committee's view, however, for a State to require that a marriage, which is celebrated in accordance with religious rites, be conducted, affirmed or registered also under civil law is not incompatible with the Covenant. States are also requested to include information on this subject in their reports.

5. The right to found a family implies, in principle, the possibility to procreate and live together. When States parties adopt family planning policies, they should be compatible with the provisions of the Covenant and

should, in particular, not be discriminatory or compulsory. Similarly, the possibility to live together implies the adoption of appropriate measures, both at the internal level and as the case may be, in cooperation with other States, to ensure the unity or reunification of families, particularly when their members are separated for political, economic or similar reasons.

6. Article 23, paragraph 4, of the Covenant provides that States parties shall take appropriate steps to ensure equality of rights and responsibilities of spouses as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

With regard to equality as to marriage, the Committee wishes to note in particular that no sex-based discrimination should occur in respect of the acquisition or loss of nationality by reason of marriage. Likewise, the right of each spouse to retain the use of his or her original family name or to participate on an equal basis in the choice of a new family name should be safeguarded.

During marriage, the spouses should have equal rights and responsibilities in the family. This equality extends to all matters arising from their relationship, such as choice of residence, running of the household, education of the children and administration of assets. Such equality continues to be applicable to arrangements regarding legal separation or dissolution of the marriage.

Thus, any discriminatory treatment in regard to the grounds and procedures for separation or divorce, child custody, maintenance or alimony, visiting rights or the loss or recovery of parental authority must be prohibited, bearing in mind the paramount interest of the children in this connection. States parties should, in particular, include information in their reports concerning the provision made for the necessary protection of any children at the dissolution of a marriage or on the separation of the spouses.

GENERAL COMMENT 20 Article 7 (Forty-fourth session, 1992)

1. This general comment replaces general comment 7 (the sixteenth session, 1982) reflecting and further developing it.

2. The aim of the provisions of article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is to protect both the dignity and the physical and mental integrity of the individual. It is the duty of the State party to afford everyone protection through legislative and other measures as may be necessary against the acts prohibited by article 7, whether inflicted by people acting in their official capacity, outside their official capacity or in a private capacity. The prohibition in article 7 is complemented by the positive requirements of article 10, paragraph 1, of the Covenant, which stipulates that "All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person".

3. The text of article 7 allows of no limitation. The Committee also reaffirms that, even in situations of public emergency such as those referred to in article 4 of the Covenant, no derogation from the provision of article 7 is allowed and its provisions must remain in force. The Committee likewise

observes that no justification or extenuating circumstances may be invoked to excuse a violation of article 7 for any reasons, including those based on an order from a superior officer or public authority.

4. The Covenant does not contain any definition of the concepts covered by article 7, nor does the Committee consider it necessary to draw up a list of prohibited acts or to establish sharp distinctions between the different kinds of punishment or treatment; the distinctions depend on the nature, purpose and severity of the treatment applied.

5. The prohibition in article 7 relates not only to acts that cause physical pain but also to acts that cause mental suffering to the victim. In the Committee's view, moreover, the prohibition must extend to corporal punishment, including excessive chastisement ordered as punishment for a crime or as an educative or disciplinary measure. It is appropriate to emphasize in this regard that article 7 protects, in particular, children, pupils and patients in teaching and medical institutions.

6. The Committee notes that prolonged solitary confinement of the detained or imprisoned person may amount to acts prohibited by article 7. As the Committee has stated in its general comment No. 6 (16), article 6 of the Covenant refers generally to abolition of the death penalty in terms that strongly suggest that abolition is desirable. Moreover, when the death penalty is applied by a State party for the most serious crimes, it must not only be strictly limited in accordance with article 6 but it must be carried out in such a way as to cause the least possible physical and mental suffering.

7. Article 7 expressly prohibits medical or scientific experimentation without the free consent of the person concerned. The Committee notes that the reports of States parties generally contain little information on this point. More attention should be given to the need and means to ensure observance of this provision. The Committee also observes that special protection in regard to such experiments is necessary in the case of persons not capable of giving valid consent, and in particular those under any form of detention or imprisonment. Such persons should not be subjected to any medical or scientific experimentation that may be detrimental to their health.

8. The Committee notes that it is not sufficient for the implementation of article 7 to prohibit such treatment or punishment or to make it a crime. States parties should inform the Committee of the legislative, administrative, judicial and other measures they take to prevent and punish acts of torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment in any territory under their jurisdiction.

9. In the view of the Committee, States parties must not expose individuals to the danger of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment upon return to another country by way of their extradition, expulsion or refoulement. States parties should indicate in their reports what measures they have adopted to that end.

10. The Committee should be informed how States parties disseminate, to the population at large, relevant information concerning the ban on torture and the treatment prohibited by article 7. Enforcement personnel, medical personnel, police officers and any other persons involved in the custody or treatment of any individual subjected to any form of arrest, detention or imprisonment must receive appropriate instruction and training. States parties should inform the Committee of the instruction and training given and the way in which the prohibition of article 7 forms an integral part of the operational rules and ethical standards to be followed by such persons.

11. In addition to describing steps to provide the general protection against acts prohibited under article 7 to which anyone is entitled, the State party should provide detailed information on safeguards for the special protection of particularly vulnerable persons. It should be noted that keeping under systematic review interrogation rules, instructions, methods and practices as well as arrangements for the custody and treatment of persons subjected to any form of arrest, detention or imprisonment is an effective means of preventing cases of torture and ill-treatment. To guarantee the effective protection of detained persons, provisions should be made for detainees to be held in places officially recognized as places of detention and for their names and places of detention, as well as for the names of persons responsible for their detention, to be kept in registers readily available and accessible to those concerned, including relatives and friends. To the same effect, the time and place of all interrogations should be recorded, together with the names of all those present and this information should also be available for purposes of judicial or administrative proceedings. Provisions should also be made against incommunicado detention. In that connection, States parties should ensure that any places of detention be free from any equipment liable to be used for inflicting torture or ill-treatment. The protection of the detainee also requires that prompt and regular access be given to doctors and lawyers and, under appropriate supervision when the investigation so requires, to family members.

12. It is important for the discouragement of violations under article 7 that the law must prohibit the use of admissibility in judicial proceedings of statements or confessions obtained through torture or other prohibited treatment.

13. States parties should indicate when presenting their reports the provisions of their criminal law which penalize torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, specifying the penalties applicable to such acts, whether committed by public officials or other persons acting on behalf of the State, or by private persons. Those who violate article 7, whether by encouraging, ordering, tolerating or perpetrating prohibited acts, must be held responsible. Consequently, those who have refused to obey orders must not be punished or subjected to any adverse treatment.

14. Article 7 should be read in conjunction with article 2, paragraph 3, of the Covenant. In their reports, States parties should indicate how their legal system effectively guarantees the immediate termination of all the acts prohibited by article 7 as well as appropriate redress. The right to lodge complaints against maltreatment prohibited by article 7 must be recognized in the domestic law. Complaints must be investigated promptly and impartially by competent authorities so as to make the remedy effective. The reports of

States parties should provide specific information on the remedies available to victims of maltreatment and the procedure that complainants must follow, and statistics on the number of complaints and how they have been dealt with.

15. The Committee has noted that some States have granted amnesty in respect of acts of torture. Amnesties are generally incompatible with the duty of States to investigate such acts; to guarantee freedom from such acts within their jurisdiction; and to ensure that they do not occur in the future. States may not deprive individuals of the right to an effective remedy, including compensation and such full rehabilitation as may be possible.

GENERAL COMMENT 21 Article 10 (Forty-fourth session, 1992)

1. This general comment replaces general comment 9 (the sixteenth session, 1982) reflecting and further developing it.

2. Article 10, paragraph 1, of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights applies to any one deprived of liberty under the laws and authority of the State who is held in prisons, hospitals - particularly psychiatric hospitals - detention camps or correctional institutions or elsewhere. States parties should ensure that the principle stipulated therein is observed in all institutions and establishments within their jurisdiction where persons are being held.

3. Article 10, paragraph 1, imposes on States parties a positive obligation towards persons who are particularly vulnerable because of their status as persons deprived of liberty, and complements for them the ban on torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment contained in article 7 of the Covenant. Thus, not only may persons deprived of their liberty not be subjected to treatment that is contrary to article 7, including medical or scientific experimentation, but neither may they be subjected to any hardship or constraint other than that resulting from the deprivation of liberty; respect for the dignity of such persons must be guaranteed under the same conditions as for that of free persons. Persons deprived of their liberty enjoy all the rights set forth in the Covenant, subject to the restrictions that are unavoidable in a closed environment.

4. Treating all persons deprived of their liberty with humanity and with respect for their dignity is a fundamental and universally applicable rule. Consequently, the application of this rule, as a minimum, cannot be dependent on the material resources available in the State party. This rule must be applied without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

5. States parties are invited to indicate in their reports to what extent they are applying the relevant United Nations standards applicable to the treatment of prisoners: the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (1957), the Body of Principles for the Protection of All Persons under Any Form of Detention or Imprisonment (1988), the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials (1978) and the Principles of Medical Ethics relevant to the Role of Health Personnel, particularly Physicians, in the Protection of Prisoners and Detainees against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1982).

6. The Committee recalls that reports should provide detailed information on national legislative and administrative provisions that have a bearing on the right provided for in article 10, paragraph 1. The Committee also considers that it is necessary for reports to specify what concrete measures have been taken by the competent authorities to monitor the effective application of the rules regarding the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty. States parties should include in their reports information concerning the system for supervising penitentiary establishments, the specific measures to prevent torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and how impartial supervision is ensured.

7. Furthermore, the Committee recalls that reports should indicate whether the various applicable provisions form an integral part of the instruction and training of the personnel who have authority over persons deprived of their liberty and whether they are strictly adhered to by such personnel in the discharge of their duties. It would also be appropriate to specify whether arrested or detained persons have access to such information and have effective legal means enabling them to ensure that those rules are respected, to complain if the rules are ignored and to obtain adequate compensation in the event of a violation.

8. The Committee recalls that the principle set forth in article 10, paragraph 1, constitutes the basis for the more specific obligations of States parties in respect of criminal justice, which are set forth in article 10, paragraphs 2 and 3.

9. Article 10, paragraph 2 (a), provides for the segregation, save in exceptional circumstances, of accused persons from convicted ones. Such segregation is required in order to emphasize their status as unconvicted persons who at the same time enjoy the right to be presumed innocent as stated in article 14, paragraph 2. The reports of States parties should indicate how the separation of accused persons from convicted persons is effected and explain how the treatment of accused persons differs from that of convicted persons.

10. As to article 10, paragraph 3, which concerns convicted persons, the Committee wishes to have detailed information on the operation of the penitentiary system of the State party. No penitentiary system should be only retributory; it should essentially seek the reformation and social rehabilitation of the prisoner. States parties are invited to specify whether they have a system to provide assistance after release and to give information as to its success.

11. In a number of cases, the information furnished by the State party contains no specific reference either to legislative or administrative provisions or to practical measures to ensure the re-education of convicted persons. The Committee requests specific information concerning the measures taken to provide teaching, education and re-education, vocational guidance and training and also concerning work programmes for prisoners inside the penitentiary establishment as well as outside.

12. In order to determine whether the principle set forth in article 10, paragraph 3, is being fully respected, the Committee also requests information on the specific measures applied during detention, e.g., how convicted persons

are dealt with individually and how they are categorized, the disciplinary system, solitary confinement and high-security detention and the conditions under which contacts are ensured with the outside world (family, lawyer, social and medical services, non-governmental organizations).

13. Moreover, the Committee notes that in the reports of some States parties no information has been provided concerning the treatment accorded to accused juvenile persons and juvenile offenders. Article 10, paragraph 2 (b), provides that accused juvenile persons shall be separated from adults. The information given in reports shows that some States parties are not paying the necessary attention to the fact that this is a mandatory provision of the Covenant. The text also provides that cases involving juveniles must be considered as speedily as possible. Reports should specify the measures taken by States parties to give effect to that provision. Lastly, under article 10, paragraph 3, juvenile offenders shall be segregated from adults and be accorded treatment appropriate to their age and legal status in so far as conditions of detention are concerned, such as shorter working hours and contact with relatives, with the aim of furthering their reformation and rehabilitation. Article 10 does not indicate any limits of juvenile age. While this is to be determined by each State party in the light of relevant social, cultural and other conditions, the Committee is of the opinion that article 6, paragraph 5, suggests that all persons under the age of 18 should be treated as juveniles, at least in matters relating to criminal justice. States should give relevant information about the age groups of persons treated as juveniles. In that regard, States parties are invited to indicate whether they are applying the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice, known as the Beijing Rules (1987).

GENERAL COMMENT 22 Article 18 (Forty-eighth session 1993)

1. The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (which includes the freedom to hold beliefs) in article 18.1 is far-reaching and profound; it encompasses freedom of thought on all matters, personal conviction and the commitment to religion or belief, whether manifested individually or in community with others. The Committee draws the attention of States parties to the fact that the freedom of thought and the freedom of conscience are protected equally with the freedom of religion and belief. The fundamental character of these freedoms is also reflected in the fact that this provision cannot be derogated from, even in time of public emergency, as stated in article 4.2 of the Covenant.

2. Article 18 protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. The terms "belief" and "religion" are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reason, including the fact that they are newly established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility on the part of a predominant religious community.

3. Article 18 distinguishes the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief from the freedom to manifest religion or belief. It does not permit any limitations whatsoever on the freedom of thought and conscience or on the freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of one's choice. These freedoms are protected unconditionally, as is the right of everyone to hold opinions without interference in article 19.1. In accordance with articles 18.2 and 17, no one can be compelled to reveal his thoughts or adherence to a religion or belief.

4. The freedom to manifest religion or belief may be exercised "either individually or in community with others and in public or private". The freedom to manifest religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching encompasses a broad range of acts. The concept of worship extends to ritual and ceremonial acts giving direct expression to belief, as well as various practices integral to such acts, including the building of places of worship, the use of ritual formulae and objects, the display of symbols, and the observance of holidays and days of rest. The observance and practice of religion or belief may include not only ceremonial acts but also such customs as the observance of dietary regulations, the wearing of distinctive clothing or headcoverings, participation in rituals associated with certain stages of life, and the use of a particular language customarily spoken by a group. In addition, the practice and teaching of religion or belief includes acts integral to the conduct by religious groups of their basic affairs, such as the freedom to choose their religious leaders, priests and teachers, the freedom to establish seminaries or religious schools and the freedom to prepare and distribute religious texts or publications.

5. The Committee observes that the freedom to "have or to adopt" a religion or belief necessarily entails the freedom to choose a religion or belief, including the right to replace one's current religion or belief with another or to adopt atheistic views, as well as the right to retain one's religion or belief. Article 18.2 bars coercion that would impair the right to have or adopt a religion or belief, including the use of threat of physical force or penal sanctions to compel believers or non-believers to adhere to their religious beliefs and congregations, to recant their religion or belief or to convert. Policies or practices having the same intention or effect, such as, for example, those restricting access to education, medical care, employment or the rights guaranteed by article 25 and other provisions of the Covenant, are similarly inconsistent with article 18.2. The same protection is enjoyed by holders of all beliefs of a non-religious nature.

6. The Committee is of the view that article 18.4 permits public school instruction in subjects such as the general history of religions and ethics if it is given in a neutral and objective way. The liberty of parents or legal guardians to ensure that their children receive a religious and moral education in conformity with their own convictions, set forth in article 18.4, is related to the guarantees of the freedom to teach a religion or belief stated in article 18.1. The Committee notes that public education that includes instruction in a particular religion or belief is inconsistent with article 18.4 unless provision is made for non-discriminatory exemptions or alternatives that would accommodate the wishes of parents and guardians.

7. In accordance with article 20, no manifestation of religion or belief may amount to propaganda for war or advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. As stated by the Committee in its General Comment 11 [19], States parties are under the obligation to enact laws to prohibit such acts.

8. Article 18.3 permits restrictions on the freedom to manifest religion or belief only if limitations are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. The freedom from coercion to have or to adopt a religion or belief and the liberty of parents and guardians to ensure religious and moral education cannot be restricted. In interpreting the scope of permissible limitation clauses, States parties should proceed from the need to protect the rights guaranteed under the Covenant, including the right to equality and non-discrimination on all grounds specified in articles 2, 3 and 26. Limitations imposed must be established by law and must not be applied in a manner that would vitiate the rights guaranteed in article 18. The Committee observes that paragraph 3 of article 18 is to be strictly interpreted: restrictions are not allowed on grounds not specified there, even if they would be allowed as restrictions to other rights protected in the Covenant, such as national security. Limitations may be applied only for those purposes for which they were prescribed and must be directly related and proportionate to the specific need on which they are predicated. Restrictions may not be imposed for discriminatory purposes or applied in a discriminatory manner. The Committee observes that the concept of morals derives from many social, philosophical and religious traditions; consequently, limitations on the freedom to manifest a religion or belief for the purpose of protecting morals must be based on principles not deriving exclusively from a single tradition. Persons already subject to certain legitimate constraints, such as prisoners, continue to enjoy their rights to manifest their religion or belief to the fullest extent compatible with the specific nature of the constraint. States parties' reports should provide information on the full scope and effects of limitations under article 18.3, both as a matter of law and of their application in specific circumstances.

9. The fact that a religion is recognized as a state religion or that it is established as official or traditional or that its followers comprise the majority of the population, shall not result in any impairment of the enjoyment of any of the rights under the Covenant, including articles 18 and 27, nor in any discrimination against adherents to other religions or non-believers. In particular, certain measures discriminating against the latter, such as measures restricting eligibility for government service to members of the predominant religion or giving economic privileges to them or imposing special restrictions on the practice of other faiths, are not in accordance with the prohibition of discrimination based on religion or belief and the guarantee of equal protection under article 26. The measures contemplated by article 20, paragraph 2 of the Covenant constitute important safeguards against infringement of the rights of religious minorities and of other religious groups to exercise the rights guaranteed by articles 18 and 27, and against acts of violence or persecution directed towards those groups. The Committee wishes to be informed of measures taken by States parties concerned to protect the practices of all religions or beliefs from infringement and to protect their followers from discrimination. Similarly,

information as to respect for the rights of religious minorities under article 27 is necessary for the Committee to assess the extent to which the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief has been implemented by States parties. States parties concerned should also include in their reports information relating to practices considered by their laws and jurisprudence to be punishable as blasphemous.

10. If a set of beliefs is treated as official ideology in constitutions, statutes, proclamations of ruling parties, etc., or in actual practice, this shall not result in any impairment of the freedoms under article 18 or any other rights recognized under the Covenant nor in any discrimination against persons who do not accept the official ideology or who oppose it.

11. Many individuals have claimed the right to refuse to perform military service (conscientious objection) on the basis that such right derives from their freedoms under article 18. In response to such claims, a growing number of States have in their laws exempted from compulsory military service citizens who genuinely hold religious or other beliefs that forbid the performance of military service and replaced it with alternative national service. The Covenant does not explicitly refer to a right to conscientious objection, but the Committee believes that such a right can be derived from article 18, inasmuch as the obligation to use lethal force may seriously conflict with the freedom of conscience and the right to manifest one's religion or belief. When this right is recognized by law or practice, there shall be no differentiation among conscientious objectors on the basis of the nature of their particular beliefs; likewise, there shall be no discrimination against conscientious objectors because they have failed to perform military service. The Committee invites States parties to report on the conditions under which persons can be exempted from military service on the basis of their rights under article 18 and on the nature and length of alternative national service.

GENERAL COMMENT 23 Article 27 (Fiftieth session, 1994)

1. Article 27 of the Covenant provides that, in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to these minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language. The Committee observes that this article establishes and recognizes a right which is conferred on individuals belonging to minority groups and which is distinct from, and additional to, all the other rights which, as individuals in common with everyone else, they are already entitled to enjoy under the Covenant.

2. In some communications submitted to the Committee under the Optional Protocol, the right protected under article 27 has been confused with the right of peoples to self-determination proclaimed in article 1 of the Covenant. Further, in reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant, the obligations placed upon States parties under article 27 have sometimes been confused with their duty under article 2.1 to ensure the enjoyment of the rights guaranteed under the Covenant without discrimination and also with equality before the law and equal protection of the law under article 26.

3.1. The Covenant draws a distinction between the right to self-determination and the rights protected under article 27. The former is expressed to be a right belonging to peoples and is dealt with in a separate part (Part I) of the Covenant. Self-determination is not a right cognizable under the Optional Protocol. Article 27, on the other hand, relates to rights conferred on individuals as such and is included, like the articles relating to other personal rights conferred on individuals, in Part III of the Covenant and is cognizable under the Optional Protocol. 1/

3.2. The enjoyment of the rights to which article 27 relates does not prejudice the sovereignty and territorial integrity of a State party. At the same time, one or other aspect of the rights of individuals protected under that article - for example, to enjoy a particular culture - may consist in a way of life which is closely associated with territory and use of its resources. 2/ This may particularly be true of members of indigenous communities constituting a minority.

4. The Covenant also distinguishes the rights protected under article 27 from the guarantees under articles 2.1 and 26. The entitlement, under article 2.1, to enjoy the rights under the Covenant without discrimination applies to all individuals within the territory or under the jurisdiction of the State whether or not those persons belong to a minority. In addition, there is a distinct right provided under article 26 for equality before the law, equal protection of the law, and non-discrimination in respect of rights granted and obligations imposed by the States. It governs the exercise of all rights, whether protected under the Covenant or not, which the State party confers by law on individuals within its territory or under its jurisdiction, irrespective of whether they belong to the minorities specified in article 27 or not. 3/ Some States parties who claim that they do not discriminate on grounds of ethnicity, language or religion, wrongly contend, on that basis alone, that they have no minorities.

5.1. The terms used in article 27 indicate that the persons designed to be protected are those who belong to a group and who share in common a culture, a religion and/or a language. Those terms also indicate that the individuals designed to be protected need not be citizens of the State party. In this regard, the obligations deriving from article 2.1 are also relevant, since a State party is required under that article to ensure that the rights protected under the Covenant are available to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction, except rights which are expressly made to apply to citizens, for example, political rights under article 25. A State party may not, therefore, restrict the rights under article 27 to its citizens alone.

5.2. Article 27 confers rights on persons belonging to minorities which "exist" in a State party. Given the nature and scope of the rights envisaged under that article, it is not relevant to determine the degree of permanence that the term "exist" connotes. Those rights simply are that individuals belonging to those minorities should not be denied the right, in community with members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to practise their religion and speak their language. Just as they need not be nationals or citizens, they need not be permanent residents. Thus, migrant workers or even visitors in a State party constituting such minorities are entitled not to be denied the exercise of those rights. As any other individual in the territory of the State party, they would, also for this purpose, have the general rights, for example, to freedom of association, of assembly, and of expression. The existence of an ethnic, religious or linguistic minority in a given State party does not depend upon a decision by that State party but requires to be established by objective criteria.

5.3. The right of individuals belonging to a linguistic minority to use their language among themselves, in private or in public, is distinct from other language rights protected under the Covenant. In particular, it should be distinguished from the general right to freedom of expression protected under article 19. The latter right is available to all persons, irrespective of whether they belong to minorities or not. Further, the right protected under article 27 should be distinguished from the particular right which article 14.3 (f) of the Covenant confers on accused persons to interpretation where they cannot understand or speak the language used in the courts. Article 14.3 (f) does not, in any other circumstances, confer on accused persons the right to use or speak the language of their choice in court proceedings. 4/

6.1. Although article 27 is expressed in negative terms, that article, nevertheless, does recognize the existence of a "right" and requires that it shall not be denied. Consequently, a State party is under an obligation to ensure that the existence and the exercise of this right are protected against their denial or violation. Positive measures of protection are, therefore, required not only against the acts of the State party itself, whether through its legislative, judicial or administrative authorities, but also against the acts of other persons within the State party.

6.2. Although the rights protected under article 27 are individual rights, they depend in turn on the ability of the minority group to maintain its culture, language or religion. Accordingly, positive measures by States may also be necessary to protect the identity of a minority and the rights of its members to enjoy and develop their culture and language and to practise their religion, in community with the other members of the group. In this connection, it has to be observed that such positive measures must respect the provisions of articles 2.1 and 26 of the Covenant both as regards the treatment between different minorities and the treatment between the persons belonging to them and the remaining part of the population. However, as long as those measures are aimed at correcting conditions which prevent or impair the enjoyment of the rights guaranteed under article 27, they may constitute a legitimate differentiation under the Covenant, provided that they are based on reasonable and objective criteria.

7. With regard to the exercise of the cultural rights protected under article 27, the Committee observes that culture manifests itself in many forms, including a particular way of life associated with the use of land resources, especially in the case of indigenous peoples. That right may include such traditional activities as fishing or hunting and the right to live in reserves protected by law. 5/ The enjoyment of those rights may require positive legal measures of protection and measures to ensure the effective participation of members of minority communities in decisions which affect them.

8. The Committee observes that none of the rights protected under article 27 of the Covenant may be legitimately exercised in a manner or to an extent inconsistent with the other provisions of the Covenant.

9. The Committee concludes that article 27 relates to rights whose protection imposes specific obligations on States parties. The protection of these rights is directed towards ensuring the survival and continued development of the cultural, religious and social identity of the minorities concerned, thus enriching the fabric of society as a whole. Accordingly, the Committee observes that these rights must be protected as such and should not be confused with other personal rights conferred on one and all under the Covenant. States parties, therefore, have an obligation to ensure that the exercise of these rights is fully protected and they should indicate in their reports the measures they have adopted to this end.

Notes

1/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 40 (A/39/40), annex VI, General Comment No. 12 (21) (article 1), also issued in document CCPR/C/21/Rev.1; ibid., Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 40, (A/45/40), vol. II, annex IX, sect. A, Communication No. 167/1984 (Bernard Ominayak, Chief of the Lubicon Lake Band v. Canada), views adopted on 26 March 1990.

2/ See ibid., Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 40 (A/43/40), annex VII, sect. G, Communication No. 197/1985 (Kitok v. Sweden), views adopted on 27 July 1988.

3/ See ibid., Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 40 (A/42/40), annex VIII, sect. D, Communication No. 182/1984 (F.H. Zwaan-de Vries v. the Netherlands), views adopted on 9 April 1987; ibid., sect. C, Communication No. 180/1984 (L.G. Danning v. the Netherlands), views adopted on 9 April 1987.

4/ See ibid., Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 40, (A/45/40), vol. II, annex X, sect. A, Communication No. 220/1987 (T.K. v. France), decision of 8 November 1989; ibid., sect. B, Communication No. 222/1987 (M.K. v. France), decision of 8 November 1989.

5/ See notes 1 and 2 above, Communication No. 167/1984 (Bernard Ominayak, Chief of the Lubicon Lake Band v. Canada), views adopted on 26 March 1990, and Communication No. 197/1985 (Kitok v. Sweden), views adopted on 27 July 1988.

GENERAL COMMENT 24 General comment on issues relating to reservations made upon ratification or accession to the Covenant or the Optional Protocols thereto, or in relation to declarations under article 41 of the Covenant

(fifty-second session, 1994)

1. As of 1 November 1994, 46 of the 127 States parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights had, between them, entered 150 reservations of varying significance to their acceptance of the obligations of the Covenant. Some of these reservations exclude the duty to provide and guarantee particular rights in the Covenant. Others are couched in more general terms, often directed to ensuring the continued paramountcy of certain domestic legal provisions. Still others are directed at the competence of the Committee. The number of reservations, their content and their scope may undermine the effective implementation of the Covenant and tend to weaken respect for the obligations of States parties. It is important for States parties to know exactly what obligations they, and other States parties, have in fact undertaken. And the Committee, in the performance of its duties under either article 40 of the Covenant or under the Optional Protocols, must know whether a State is bound by a particular obligation or to what extent. This will require a determination as to whether a unilateral statement is a reservation or an interpretative declaration and a determination of its acceptability and effects.

2. For these reasons the Committee has deemed it useful to address in a General Comment the issues of international law and human rights policy that arise. The General Comment identifies the principles of international law that apply to the making of reservations and by reference to which their acceptability is to be tested and their purport to be interpreted. It addresses the role of States parties in relation to the reservations of others. It further addresses the role of the Committee itself in relation to reservations. And it makes certain recommendations to present States parties for a reviewing of reservations and to those States that are not yet parties about legal and human rights policy considerations to be borne in mind should they consider ratifying or acceding with particular reservations.

3. It is not always easy to distinguish a reservation from a declaration as to a State's understanding of the interpretation of a provision, or from a statement of policy. Regard will be had to the intention of the State, rather than the form of the instrument. If a statement, irrespective of its name or title, purports to exclude or modify the legal effect of a treaty in its application to the State, it constitutes a reservation. 1/ Conversely, if a so-called reservation merely offers a State's understanding of a provision but does not exclude or modify that provision in its application to that State, it is, in reality, not a reservation.

4. The possibility of entering reservations may encourage States which consider that they have difficulties in guaranteeing all the rights in the Covenant none the less to accept the generality of obligations in that instrument. Reservations may serve a useful function to enable States to adapt specific elements in their laws to the inherent rights of each person as articulated in the Covenant. However, it is desirable in principle that

States accept the full range of obligations, because the human rights norms are the legal expression of the essential rights that every person is entitled to as a human being.

5. The Covenant neither prohibits reservations nor mentions any type of permitted reservation. The same is true of the first Optional Protocol. The Second Optional Protocol provides, in article 2, paragraph 1, that "No reservation is admissible to the present Protocol, except for a reservation made at the time of ratification or accession that provides for the application of the death penalty in time of war pursuant to a conviction for a most serious crime of a military nature committed during wartime". Paragraphs 2 and 3 provide for certain procedural obligations.

6. The absence of a prohibition on reservations does not mean that any reservation is permitted. The matter of reservations under the Covenant and the first Optional Protocol is governed by international law. Article 19 (3) of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties provides relevant guidance. 2/ It stipulates that where a reservation is not prohibited by the treaty or falls within the specified permitted categories, a State may make a reservation provided it is not incompatible with the object and purpose of the treaty. Even though, unlike some other human rights treaties, the Covenant does not incorporate a specific reference to the object and purpose test, that test governs the matter of interpretation and acceptability of reservations.

7. In an instrument which articulates very many civil and political rights, each of the many articles, and indeed their interplay, secures the objectives of the Covenant. The object and purpose of the Covenant is to create legally binding standards for human rights by defining certain civil and political rights and placing them in a framework of obligations which are legally binding for those States which ratify; and to provide an efficacious supervisory machinery for the obligations undertaken.

8. Reservations that offend peremptory norms would not be compatible with the object and purpose of the Covenant. Although treaties that are mere exchanges of obligations between States allow them to reserve inter se application of rules of general international law, it is otherwise in human rights treaties, which are for the benefit of persons within their jurisdiction. Accordingly, provisions in the Covenant that represent customary international law (and a fortiori when they have the character of peremptory norms) may not be the subject of reservations. Accordingly, a State may not reserve the right to engage in slavery, to torture, to subject persons to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, to arbitrarily deprive persons of their lives, to arbitrarily arrest and detain persons, to deny freedom of thought, conscience and religion, to presume a person guilty unless he proves his innocence, to execute pregnant women or children, to permit the advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred, to deny to persons of marriageable age the right to marry, or to deny to minorities the right to enjoy their own culture, profess their own religion, or use their own language. And while reservations to particular clauses of article 14 may be acceptable, a general reservation to the right to a fair trial would not be.

9. Applying more generally the object and purpose test to the Covenant, the Committee notes that, for example, reservation to article 1 denying peoples the right to determine their own political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development, would be incompatible with the object and purpose of the Covenant. Equally, a reservation to the obligation to respect and ensure the rights, and to do so on a non-discriminatory basis (article 2 (1)) would not be acceptable. Nor may a State reserve an entitlement not to take the necessary steps at the domestic level to give effect to the rights of the Covenant (article 2 (2)).

10. The Committee has further examined whether categories of reservations may offend the "object and purpose" test. In particular, it falls for consideration as to whether reservations to the non-derogable provisions of the Covenant are compatible with its object and purpose. While there is no hierarchy of importance of rights under the Covenant, the operation of certain rights may not be suspended, even in times of national emergency. This underlines the great importance of non-derogable rights. But not all rights of profound importance, such as articles 9 and 27 of the Covenant, have in fact been made non-derogable. One reason for certain rights being made non-derogable is because their suspension is irrelevant to the legitimate control of the state of national emergency (for example, no imprisonment for debt, in article 11). Another reason is that derogation may indeed be impossible (as, for example, freedom of conscience). At the same time, some provisions are non-derogable exactly because without them there would be no rule of law. A reservation to the provisions of article 4 itself, which precisely stipulates the balance to be struck between the interests of the State and the rights of the individual in times of emergency, would fall in this category. And some non-derogable rights, which in any event cannot be reserved because of their status as peremptory norms, are also of this character - the prohibition of torture and arbitrary deprivation of life are examples. 3/ While there is no automatic correlation between reservations to non-derogable provisions, and reservations which offend against the object and purpose of the Covenant, a State has a heavy onus to justify such a reservation.

11. The Covenant consists not just of the specified rights, but of important supportive guarantees. These guarantees provide the necessary framework for securing the rights in the Covenant and are thus essential to its object and purpose. Some operate at the national level and some at the international level. Reservations designed to remove these guarantees are thus not acceptable. Thus, a State could not make a reservation to article 2, paragraph 3, of the Covenant, indicating that it intends to provide no remedies for human rights violations. Guarantees such as these are an integral part of the structure of the Covenant and underpin its efficacy. The Covenant also envisages, for the better attainment of its stated objectives, a monitoring role for the Committee. Reservations that purport to evade that essential element in the design of the Covenant, which is also directed to securing the enjoyment of the rights, are also incompatible with its object and purpose. A State may not reserve the right not to present a report and have it considered by the Committee. The Committee's role under the Covenant, whether under article 40 or under the Optional Protocols, necessarily entails interpreting the provisions of the Covenant and the development of a

jurisprudence. Accordingly, a reservation that rejects the Committee's competence to interpret the requirements of any provisions of the Covenant would also be contrary to the object and purpose of that treaty.

12. The intention of the Covenant is that the rights contained therein should be ensured to all those under a State party's jurisdiction. To this end certain attendant requirements are likely to be necessary. Domestic laws may need to be altered properly to reflect the requirements of the Covenant; and mechanisms at the domestic level will be needed to allow the Covenant rights to be enforceable at the local level. Reservations often reveal a tendency of States not to want to change a particular law. And sometimes that tendency is elevated to a general policy. Of particular concern are widely formulated reservations which essentially render ineffective all Covenant rights which would require any change in national law to ensure compliance with Covenant obligations. No real international rights or obligations have thus been accepted. And when there is an absence of provisions to ensure that Covenant rights may be sued on in domestic courts, and, further, a failure to allow individual complaints to be brought to the Committee under the first Optional Protocol, all the essential elements of the Covenant guarantees have been removed.

13. The issue arises as to whether reservations are permissible under the first Optional Protocol and, if so, whether any such reservation might be contrary to the object and purpose of the Covenant or of the first Optional Protocol itself. It is clear that the first Optional Protocol is itself an international treaty, distinct from the Covenant but closely related to it. Its object and purpose is to recognize the competence of the Committee to receive and consider communications from individuals who claim to be victims of a violation by a State party of any of the rights in the Covenant. States accept the substantive rights of individuals by reference to the Covenant, and not the first Optional Protocol. The function of the first Optional Protocol is to allow claims in respect of those rights to be tested before the Committee. Accordingly, a reservation to an obligation of a State to respect and ensure a right contained in the Covenant, made under the first Optional Protocol when it has not previously been made in respect of the same rights under the Covenant, does not affect the State's duty to comply with its substantive obligation. A reservation cannot be made to the Covenant through the vehicle of the Optional Protocol but such a reservation would operate to ensure that the State's compliance with that obligation may not be tested by the Committee under the first Optional Protocol. And because the object and purpose of the first Optional Protocol is to allow the rights obligatory for a State under the Covenant to be tested before the Committee, a reservation that seeks to preclude this would be contrary to the object and purpose of the first Optional Protocol, even if not of the Covenant. A reservation to a substantive obligation made for the first time under the first Optional Protocol would seem to reflect an intention by the State concerned to prevent the Committee from expressing its views relating to a particular article of the Covenant in an individual case.

14. The Committee considers that reservations relating to the required procedures under the first Optional Protocol would not be compatible with its object and purpose. The Committee must control its own procedures as specified by the Optional Protocol and its rules of procedure. Reservations

have, however, purported to limit the competence of the Committee to acts and events occurring after entry into force for the State concerned of the first Optional Protocol. In the view of the Committee this is not a reservation but, most usually, a statement consistent with its normal competence _ratione temporis_. At the same time, the Committee has insisted upon its competence, even in the face of such statements or observations, when events or acts occurring before the date of entry into force of the first Optional Protocol have continued to have an effect on the rights of a victim subsequent to that date. Reservations have been entered which effectively add an additional ground of inadmissibility under article 5, paragraph 2, by precluding examination of a communication when the same matter has already been examined by another comparable procedure. In so far as the most basic obligation has been to secure independent third party review of the human rights of individuals, the Committee has, where the legal right and the subject-matter are identical under the Covenant and under another international instrument, viewed such a reservation as not violating the object and purpose of the first Optional Protocol.

15. The primary purpose of the Second Optional Protocol is to extend the scope of the substantive obligations undertaken under the Covenant, as they relate to the right to life, by prohibiting execution and abolishing the death penalty. _4_/ It has its own provision concerning reservations, which is determinative of what is permitted. Article 2, paragraph 1, provides that only one category of reservation is permitted, namely one that reserves the right to apply the death penalty in time of war pursuant to a conviction for a most serious crime of a military nature committed during wartime. Two procedural obligations are incumbent upon States parties wishing to avail themselves of such a reservation. Article 2, paragraph 1, obliges such a State to inform the Secretary-General, at the time of ratification or accession, of the relevant provisions of its national legislation during warfare. This is clearly directed towards the objectives of specificity and transparency and in the view of the Committee a purported reservation unaccompanied by such information is without legal effect. Article 2, paragraph 3, requires a State making such a reservation to notify the Secretary-General of the beginning or ending of a state of war applicable to its territory. In the view of the Committee, no State may seek to avail itself of its reservation (that is, have execution in time of war regarded as lawful) unless it has complied with the procedural requirement of article 2, paragraph 3.

16. The Committee finds it important to address which body has the legal authority to make determinations as to whether specific reservations are compatible with the object and purpose of the Covenant. As for international treaties in general, the International Court of Justice has indicated in the _Reservations to the Genocide Convention Case_ (1951) that a State which objected to a reservation on the grounds of incompatibility with the object and purpose of a treaty could, through objecting, regard the treaty as not in effect as between itself and the reserving State. Article 20, paragraph 4, of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties 1969 contains provisions most relevant to the present case on acceptance of and objection to reservations. This provides for the possibility of a State to object to a reservation made by another State. Article 21 deals with the legal effects of objections by States to reservations made by other States. Essentially, a reservation

precludes the operation, as between the reserving and other States, of the provision reserved; and an objection thereto leads to the reservation being in operation as between the reserving and objecting State only to the extent that it has not been objected to.

17. As indicated above, it is the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties that provides the definition of reservations and also the application of the object and purpose test in the absence of other specific provisions. But the Committee believes that its provisions on the role of State objections in relation to reservations are inappropriate to address the problem of reservations to human rights treaties. Such treaties, and the Covenant specifically, are not a web of inter-State exchanges of mutual obligations. They concern the endowment of individuals with rights. The principle of inter-State reciprocity has no place, save perhaps in the limited context of reservations to declarations on the Committee's competence under article 41. And because the operation of the classic rules on reservations is so inadequate for the Covenant, States have often not seen any legal interest in or need to object to reservations. The absence of protest by States cannot imply that a reservation is either compatible or incompatible with the object and purpose of the Covenant. Objections have been occasional, made by some States but not others, and on grounds not always specified; when an objection is made, it often does not specify a legal consequence, or sometimes even indicates that the objecting party none the less does not regard the Covenant as not in effect as between the parties concerned. In short, the pattern is so unclear that it is not safe to assume that a non-objecting State thinks that a particular reservation is acceptable. In the view of the Committee, because of the special characteristics of the Covenant as a human rights treaty, it is open to question what effect objections have between States _inter se_. However, an objection to a reservation made by States may provide some guidance to the Committee in its interpretation as to its compatibility with the object and purpose of the Covenant.

18. It necessarily falls to the Committee to determine whether a specific reservation is compatible with the object and purpose of the Covenant. This is in part because, as indicated above, it is an inappropriate task for States parties in relation to human rights treaties, and in part because it is a task that the Committee cannot avoid in the performance of its functions. In order to know the scope of its duty to examine a State's compliance under article 40 or a communication under the first Optional Protocol, the Committee has necessarily to take a view on the compatibility of a reservation with the object and purpose of the Covenant and with general international law. Because of the special character of a human rights treaty, the compatibility of a reservation with the object and purpose of the Covenant must be established objectively, by reference to legal principles, and the Committee is particularly well placed to perform this task. The normal consequence of an unacceptable reservation is not that the Covenant will not be in effect at all for a reserving party. Rather, such a reservation will generally be severable, in the sense that the Covenant will be operative for the reserving party without benefit of the reservation.

19. Reservations must be specific and transparent, so that the Committee, those under the jurisdiction of the reserving State and other States parties may be clear as to what obligations of human rights compliance have or have

not been undertaken. Reservations may thus not be general, but must refer to a particular provision of the Covenant and indicate in precise terms its scope in relation thereto. When considering the compatibility of possible reservations with the object and purpose of the Covenant, States should also take into consideration the overall effect of a group of reservations, as well as the effect of each reservation on the integrity of the Covenant, which remains an essential consideration. States should not enter so many reservations that they are in effect accepting a limited number of human rights obligations, and not the Covenant as such. So that reservations do not lead to a perpetual non-attainment of international human rights standards, reservations should not systematically reduce the obligations undertaken only to those presently existing in less demanding standards of domestic law. Nor should interpretative declarations or reservations seek to remove an autonomous meaning to Covenant obligations, by pronouncing them to be identical, or to be accepted only in so far as they are identical, with existing provisions of domestic law. States should not seek through reservations or interpretative declarations to determine that the meaning of a provision of the Covenant is the same as that given by an organ of any other international treaty body.

20. States should institute procedures to ensure that each and every proposed reservation is compatible with the object and purpose of the Covenant. It is desirable for a State entering a reservation to indicate in precise terms the domestic legislation or practices which it believes to be incompatible with the Covenant obligation reserved; and to explain the time period it requires to render its own laws and practices compatible with the Covenant, or why it is unable to render its own laws and practices compatible with the Covenant. States should also ensure that the necessity for maintaining reservations is periodically reviewed, taking into account any observations and recommendations made by the Committee during examination of their reports. Reservations should be withdrawn at the earliest possible moment. Reports to the Committee should contain information on what action has been taken to review, reconsider or withdraw reservations.

Notes

1/ Article 2 (1) (d), Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties 1969.

2/ Although the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties was concluded in 1969 and entered into force in 1980 - i.e. after the entry into force of the Covenant - its terms reflect the general international law on this matter as had already been affirmed by the International Court of Justice in The Reservations to the Genocide Convention Case of 1951.

3/ Reservations have been entered to both article 6 and article 7, but not in terms which reserve a right to torture or to engage in arbitrary deprivation of life.

4/ The competence of the Committee in respect of this extended obligation is provided for under article 5 - which itself is subject to a form of reservation in that the automatic granting of this competence may be reserved through the mechanism of a statement made to the contrary at the moment of ratification or accession.

II

GENERAL COMMENTS

adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Introduction: the purpose of general comments*

1. At its second session, in 1988, the Committee decided (E/1988/14, paras. 366 and 367), pursuant to an invitation addressed to it by the Economic and Social Council (resolution 1987/5) and endorsed by the General Assembly (resolution 42/102), to begin, as from its third session, the preparation of general comments based on the various articles and provisions of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights with a view to assisting the States parties in fulfilling their reporting obligations.

2. The Committee, and the sessional working group of governmental experts which existed prior to the creation of the Committee, have examined 138 initial reports and 44 second periodic reports concerning rights covered by articles 6 to 9, 10 to 12 and 13 to 15 of the Covenant as of the end of its third session. This experience covers a significant number of States parties to the Covenant, currently consisting of 92 States. They represent all regions of the world, with different socio-economic, cultural, political and legal systems. Their reports submitted so far illustrate many of the problems which might arise in implementing the Covenant although they have not yet provided any complete picture as to the global situation with regard to the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. The introduction to annex III (General Comments) of the Committee's 1989 report to the Economic and Social Council (E/1989/22) explains the purpose of the general comments as follows:

3. "The Committee endeavours, through its general comments, to make the experience gained so far through the examination of these reports available for the benefit of all States parties in order to assist and promote their further implementation of the Covenant; to draw the attention of the States parties to insufficiencies disclosed by a large number of reports; to suggest improvements in the reporting procedures and to stimulate the activities of the States parties, the international organizations and the specialized agencies concerned in achieving progressively and effectively the full realization of the rights recognized in the Covenant. Whenever necessary, the Committee may, in the light of the experience of States parties and of the conclusions which it has drawn therefrom, revise and update its general comments."

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* Contained in document E/1989/22.

GENERAL COMMENT 1 (Third session, 1989)*

Reporting by States parties

1. The reporting obligations which are contained in part IV of the Covenant are designed principally to assist each State party in fulfilling its obligations under the Covenant and, in addition, to provide a basis on which the Council, assisted by the Committee, can discharge its responsibilities for monitoring States parties' compliance with their obligations and for facilitating the realization of economic, social and cultural rights in accordance with the provisions of the Covenant. The Committee considers that it would be incorrect to assume that reporting is essentially only a procedural matter designed solely to satisfy each State party's formal obligation to report to the appropriate international monitoring body. On the contrary, in accordance with the letter and spirit of the Covenant, the processes of preparation and submission of reports by States can, and indeed should, serve to achieve a variety of objectives.

2. A first objective, which is of particular relevance to the initial report required to be submitted within two years of the Covenant's entry into force for the State party concerned, is to ensure that a comprehensive review is undertaken with respect to national legislation, administrative rules and procedures, and practices in an effort to ensure the fullest possible conformity with the Covenant. Such a review might, for example, be undertaken in conjunction with each of the relevant national ministries or other authorities responsible for policy-making and implementation in the different fields covered by the Covenant.

3. A second objective is to ensure that the State party monitors the actual situation with respect to each of the rights on a regular basis and is thus aware of the extent to which the various rights are, or are not, being enjoyed by all individuals within its territory or under its jurisdiction. From the Committee's experience to date, it is clear that the fulfilment of this objective cannot be achieved only by the preparation of aggregate national statistics or estimates, but also requires that special attention be given to any worse-off regions or areas and to any specific groups or subgroups which appear to be particularly vulnerable or disadvantaged. Thus, the essential first step towards promoting the realization of economic, social and cultural rights is diagnosis and knowledge of the existing situation. The Committee is aware that this process of monitoring and gathering information is a potentially time-consuming and costly one and that international assistance and cooperation, as provided for in article 2, paragraph 1 and articles 22 and 23 of the Covenant, may well be required in order to enable some States parties to fulfil the relevant obligations. If that is the case, and the State party concludes that it does not have the capacity to undertake the monitoring process which is an integral part of any process designed to promote accepted goals of public policy and is indispensable to the effective implementation of the Covenant, it may note this fact in its report to the Committee and indicate the nature and extent of any international assistance that it may need.

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* Contained in document E/1989/22.

4. While monitoring is designed to give a detailed overview of the existing situation, the principal value of such an overview is to provide the basis for the elaboration of clearly stated and carefully targeted policies, including the establishment of priorities which reflect the provisions of the Covenant. Therefore, a third objective of the reporting process is to enable the Government to demonstrate that such principled policy-making has in fact been undertaken. While the Covenant makes this obligation explicit only in article 14 in cases where "compulsory primary education, free of charge" has not yet been secured for all, a comparable obligation "to work out and adopt a detailed plan of action for the progressive implementation" of each of the rights contained in the Covenant is clearly implied by the obligation in article 2, paragraph 1 "to take steps ... by all appropriate means ...".

5. A fourth objective of the reporting process it to facilitate public scrutiny of government policies with respect to economic, social and cultural rights and to encourage the involvement of the various economic, social and cultural sectors of society in the formulation, implementation and review of the relevant policies. In examining reports submitted to it to date, the Committee has welcomed the fact that a number of States parties, reflecting different political and economic systems, have encouraged inputs by such non-governmental groups into the preparation of their reports under the Covenant. Other States have ensured the widespread dissemination of their reports with a view to enabling comments to be made by the public at large. In these ways, the preparation of the report, and its consideration at the national level can come to be of at least as much value as the constructive dialogue conducted at the international level between the Committee and representatives of the reporting State.

6. A fifth objective is to provide a basis on which the State party itself, as well as the Committee, can effectively evaluate the extent to which progress has been made towards the realization of the obligations contained in the Covenant. For this purpose, it may be useful for States to identify specific benchmarks or goals against which their performance in a given area can be assessed. Thus, for example, it is generally agreed that it is important to set specific goals with respect to the reduction of infant mortality, the extent of vaccination of children, the intake of calories per person, the number of persons per health-care provider, etc. In many of these areas, global benchmarks are of limited use, whereas national or other more specific benchmarks can provide an extremely valuable indication of progress.

7. In this regard, the Committee wishes to note that the Covenant attaches particular importance to the concept of "progressive realization" of the relevant rights and, for that reason, the Committee urges States parties to include in their periodic reports information which shows the progress over time, with respect to the effective realization of the relevant rights. By the same token, it is clear that qualitative, as well as quantitative, data are required in order for an adequate assessment of the situation to be made.

8. A sixth objective is to enable the State party itself to develop a better understanding of the problems and shortcomings encountered in efforts to realize progressively the full range of economic, social and cultural rights. For this reason, it is essential that States parties report in detail on the

"factors and difficulties" inhibiting such realization. This process of identification and recognition of the relevant difficulties then provides the framework within which more appropriate policies can be devised.

9. A seventh objective is to enable the Committee, and the States parties as a whole, to facilitate the exchange of information among States and to develop a better understanding of the common problems faced by States and a fuller appreciation of the type of measures which might be taken to promote effective realization of each of the rights contained in the Covenant. This part of the process also enables the Committee to identify the most appropriate means by which the international community might assist States, in accordance with articles 22 and 23 of the Covenant. In order to underline the importance which the Committee attaches to this objective, a separate general comment on those articles will be discussed by the Committee at its fourth session.

GENERAL COMMENT 2 (Fourth session, 1990)*

International technical assistance measures (art. 22 of the Covenant)

1. Article 22 of the Covenant establishes a mechanism by which the Economic and Social Council may bring to the attention of relevant United Nations bodies any matters arising out of reports submitted under the Covenant "which may assist such bodies in deciding, each within its field of competence, on the advisability of international measures likely to contribute to the effective progressive implementation of the ... Covenant". While the primary responsibility under article 22 is vested in the Council, it is clearly appropriate for the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights to play an active role in advising and assisting the Council in this regard.

2. Recommendations in accordance with article 22 may be made to any "organs of the United Nations, their subsidiary organs and specialized agencies concerned with furnishing technical assistance". The Committee considers that this provision should be interpreted so as to include virtually all United Nations organs and agencies involved in any aspect of international development cooperation. It would therefore be appropriate for recommendations in accordance with article 22 to be addressed, *inter alia*, to the Secretary-General, subsidiary organs of the Council such as the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission on Social Development and the Commission on the Status of Women, other bodies such as UNDP, UNICEF and CDP, agencies such as the World Bank and IMF, and any of the other specialized agencies such as ILO, FAO, UNESCO and WHO.

3. Article 22 could lead either to recommendations of a general policy nature or to more narrowly focused recommendations relating to a specific situation. In the former context, the principal role of the Committee would seem to be to encourage greater attention to efforts to promote economic, social and cultural rights within the framework of international development cooperation activities undertaken by, or with the assistance of, the United Nations and its agencies. In this regard the Committee notes that

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* Contained in document E/1990/23.

the Commission on Human Rights, in its resolution 1989/13 of 2 March 1989, invited it "to give consideration to means by which the various United Nations agencies working in the field of development could best integrate measures designed to promote full respect for economic, social and cultural rights in their activities".

4. As a preliminary practical matter, the Committee notes that its own endeavours would be assisted, and the relevant agencies would also be better informed, if they were to take a greater interest in the work of the Committee. While recognizing that such an interest can be demonstrated in a variety of ways, the Committee observes that attendance by representatives of the appropriate United Nations bodies at its first four sessions has, with the notable exceptions of ILO, UNESCO and WHO, been very low. Similarly, pertinent materials and written information had been received from only a very limited number of agencies. The Committee considers that a deeper understanding of the relevance of economic, social and cultural rights in the context of international development cooperation activities would be considerably facilitated through greater interaction between the Committee and the appropriate agencies. At the very least, the day of general discussion on a specific issue, which the Committee undertakes at each of its sessions, provides an ideal context in which a potentially productive exchange of views can be undertaken.

5. On the broader issues of the promotion of respect for human rights in the context of development activities, the Committee has so far seen only rather limited evidence of specific efforts by United Nations bodies. It notes with satisfaction in this regard the initiative taken jointly by the Centre for Human Rights and UNDP in writing to United Nations Resident Representatives and other field-based officials, inviting their "suggestions and advice, in particular with respect to possible forms of cooperation in ongoing projects [identified] as having a human rights dimension or in new ones in response to a specific Government's request". The Committee has also been informed of long-standing efforts undertaken by ILO to link its own human rights and other international labour standards to its technical cooperation activities.

6. With respect to such activities, two general principles are important. The first is that the two sets of human rights are indivisible and interdependent. This means that efforts to promote one set of rights should also take full account of the other. United Nations agencies involved in the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights should do their utmost to ensure that their activities are fully consistent with the enjoyment of civil and political rights. In negative terms this means that the international agencies should scrupulously avoid involvement in projects which, for example, involve the use of forced labour in contravention of international standards, or promote or reinforce discrimination against individuals or groups contrary to the provisions of the Covenant, or involve large-scale evictions or displacement of persons without the provision of all appropriate protection and compensation. In positive terms, it means that, wherever possible, the agencies should act as advocates of projects and approaches which contribute not only to economic growth or other broadly defined objectives, but also to enhanced enjoyment of the full range of human rights.

7. The second principle of general relevance is that development cooperation activities do not automatically contribute to the promotion of respect for economic, social and cultural rights. Many activities undertaken in the name of "development" have subsequently been recognized as ill-conceived and even counter-productive in human rights terms. In order to reduce the incidence of such problems, the whole range of issues dealt with in the Covenant should, wherever possible and appropriate, be given specific and careful consideration.

8. Despite the importance of seeking to integrate human rights concerns into development activities, it is true that proposals for such integration can too easily remain at a level of generality. Thus, in an effort to encourage the operationalization of the principle contained in article 22 of the Covenant, the Committee wishes to draw attention to the following specific measures which merit consideration by the relevant bodies:

(a) As a matter of principle, the appropriate United Nations organs and agencies should specifically recognize the intimate relationship which should be established between development activities and efforts to promote respect for human rights in general, and economic, social and cultural rights in particular. The Committee notes in this regard the failure of each of the first three United Nations Development Decade Strategies to recognize that relationship and urges that the fourth such strategy, to be adopted in 1990, should rectify that omission;

(b) Consideration should be given by United Nations agencies to the proposal, made by the Secretary-General in a report of 1979 1/ that a "human rights impact statement" be required to be prepared in connection with all major development cooperation activities;

(c) The training or briefing given to project and other personnel employed by United Nations agencies should include a component dealing with human rights standards and principles;

(d) Every effort should be made, at each phase of a development project, to ensure that the rights contained in the Covenants are duly taken into account. This would apply, for example, in the initial assessment of the priority needs of a particular country, in the identification of particular projects, in project design, in the implementation of the project, and in its final evaluation.

9. A matter which has been of particular concern to the Committee in the examination of the reports of States parties is the adverse impact of the debt burden and of the relevant adjustment measures on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights in many countries. The Committee recognizes that adjustment programmes will often be unavoidable and that these will frequently involve a major element of austerity. Under such circumstances, however, endeavours to protect the most basic economic, social and cultural rights become more, rather than less, urgent. States parties to the Covenant, as well as the relevant United Nations agencies, should thus make a particular effort to ensure that such protection is, to the maximum extent possible, built-in to programmes and policies designed to promote adjustment. Such an approach, which is sometimes referred to as "adjustment with a human face"

or as promoting "the human dimension of development" requires that the goal of protecting the rights of the poor and vulnerable should become a basic objective of economic adjustment. Similarly, international measures to deal with the debt crisis should take full account of the need to protect economic, social and cultural rights through, inter alia, international cooperation. In many situations, this might point to the need for major debt relief initiatives.

10. Finally, the Committee wishes to draw attention to the important opportunity provided to States parties, in accordance with article 22 of the Covenant, to identify in their reports any particular needs they might have for technical assistance or development cooperation.

Note

1/ "The international dimensions of the right to development as a human right in relation with other human rights based on international cooperation, including the right to peace, taking into account the requirements of the new international economic order and the fundamental human needs" (E/CN.4/1334, para. 314).

GENERAL COMMENT 3 (Fifth session, 1990)*

The nature of States parties obligations (art. 2, para. 1 of the Covenant)

1. Article 2 is of particular importance to a full understanding of the Covenant and must be seen as having a dynamic relationship with all of the other provisions of the Covenant. It describes the nature of the general legal obligations undertaken by States parties to the Covenant. Those obligations include both what may be termed (following the work of the International Law Commission) obligations of conduct and obligations of result. While great emphasis has sometimes been placed on the difference between the formulations used in this provision and that contained in the equivalent article 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, it is not always recognized that there are also significant similarities. In particular, while the Covenant provides for progressive realization and acknowledges the constraints due to the limits of available resources, it also imposes various obligations which are of immediate effect. Of these, two are of particular importance in understanding the precise nature of States parties obligations. One of these, which is dealt with in a separate General Comment, and which is to be considered by the Committee at its sixth session, is the "undertaking to guarantee" that relevant rights "will be exercised without discrimination ...".

2. The other is the undertaking in article 2 (1) "to take steps", which in itself, is not qualified or limited by other considerations. The full meaning of the phrase can also be gauged by noting some of the different language

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* Contained in document E/1991/23.

versions. In English the undertaking is "to take steps", in French it is "to act" ("s'engage à agir") and in Spanish it is "to adopt measures" ("a adoptar medidas"). Thus while the full realization of the relevant rights may be achieved progressively, steps towards that goal must be taken within a reasonably short time after the Covenant's entry into force for the States concerned. Such steps should be deliberate, concrete and targeted as clearly as possible towards meeting the obligations recognized in the Covenant.

3. The means which should be used in order to satisfy the obligation to take steps are stated in article 2 (1) to be "all appropriate means, including particularly the adoption of legislative measures". The Committee recognizes that in many instances legislation is highly desirable and in some cases may even be indispensable. For example, it may be difficult to combat discrimination effectively in the absence of a sound legislative foundation for the necessary measures. In fields such as health, the protection of children and mothers, and education, as well as in respect of the matters dealt with in articles 6 to 9, legislation may also be an indispensable element for many purposes.

4. The Committee notes that States parties have generally been conscientious in detailing at least some of the legislative measures that they have taken in this regard. It wishes to emphasize, however, that the adoption of legislative measures, as specifically foreseen by the Covenant, is by no means exhaustive of the obligations of States parties. Rather, the phrase "by all appropriate means" must be given its full and natural meaning. While each State party must decide for itself which means are the most appropriate under the circumstances with respect to each of the rights, the "appropriateness" of the means chosen will not always be self-evident. It is therefore desirable that States parties' reports should indicate not only the measures that have been taken but also the basis on which they are considered to be the most "appropriate" under the circumstances. However, the ultimate determination as to whether all appropriate measures have been taken remains one for the Committee to make.

5. Among the measures which might be considered appropriate, in addition to legislation, is the provision of judicial remedies with respect to rights which may, in accordance with the national legal system, be considered justiciable. The Committee notes, for example, that the enjoyment of the rights recognized, without discrimination, will often be appropriately promoted, in part, through the provision of judicial or other effective remedies. Indeed, those States parties which are also parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights are already obligated (by virtue of arts. 2 (paras. 1 and 3), 3 and 26) of that Covenant to ensure that any person whose rights or freedoms (including the right to equality and non-discrimination) recognized in that Covenant are violated, "shall have an effective remedy" (art. 2 (3) (a)). In addition, there are a number of other provisions in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including articles 3, 7 (a) (i), 8, 10 (3), 13 (2) (a), (3) and (4) and 15 (3) which would seem to be capable of immediate application by judicial and other organs in many national legal systems. Any suggestion that the provisions indicated are inherently non-self-executing would seem to be difficult to sustain.

6. Where specific policies aimed directly at the realization of the rights recognized in the Covenant have been adopted in legislative form, the Committee would wish to be informed, inter alia, as to whether such laws create any right of action on behalf of individuals or groups who feel that their rights are not being fully realized. In cases where constitutional recognition has been accorded to specific economic, social and cultural rights, or where the provisions of the Covenant have been incorporated directly into national law, the Committee would wish to receive information as to the extent to which these rights are considered to be justiciable (i.e. able to be invoked before the courts). The Committee would also wish to receive specific information as to any instances in which existing constitutional provisions relating to economic, social and cultural rights have been weakened or significantly changed.

7. Other measures which may also be considered "appropriate" for the purposes of article 2 (1) include, but are not limited to, administrative, financial, educational and social measures.

8. The Committee notes that the undertaking "to take steps ... by all appropriate means including particularly the adoption of legislative measures" neither requires nor precludes any particular form of government or economic system being used as the vehicle for the steps in question, provided only that it is democratic and that all human rights are thereby respected. Thus, in terms of political and economic systems the Covenant is neutral and its principles cannot accurately be described as being predicated exclusively upon the need for, or the desirability of a socialist or a capitalist system, or a mixed, centrally planned, or laisser-faire economy, or upon any other particular approach. In this regard, the Committee reaffirms that the rights recognized in the Covenant are susceptible of realization within the context of a wide variety of economic and political systems, provided only that the interdependence and indivisibility of the two sets of human rights, as affirmed inter alia in the preamble to the Covenant, is recognized and reflected in the system in question. The Committee also notes the relevance in this regard of other human rights and in particular the right to development.

9. The principal obligation of result reflected in article 2 (1) is to take steps "with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized" in the Covenant. The term "progressive realization" is often used to describe the intent of this phrase. The concept of progressive realization constitutes a recognition of the fact that full realization of all economic, social and cultural rights will generally not be able to be achieved in a short period of time. In this sense the obligation differs significantly from that contained in article 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which embodies an immediate obligation to respect and ensure all of the relevant rights. Nevertheless, the fact that realization over time, or in other words progressively, is foreseen under the Covenant should not be misinterpreted as depriving the obligation of all meaningful content. It is on the one hand a necessary flexibility device, reflecting the realities of the real world and the difficulties involved for any country in ensuring full realization of economic, social and cultural rights. On the other hand, the phrase must be read in the light of the overall objective, indeed the raison d'être, of the Covenant which is to establish clear obligations for States parties in respect of the full realization of the rights in question.

It thus imposes an obligation to move as expeditiously and effectively as possible towards that goal. Moreover, any deliberately retrogressive measures in that regard would require the most careful consideration and would need to be fully justified by reference to the totality of the rights provided for in the Covenant and in the context of the full use of the maximum available resources.

10. On the basis of the extensive experience gained by the Committee, as well as by the body that preceded it, over a period of more than a decade of examining States parties' reports the Committee is of the view that a minimum core obligation to ensure the satisfaction of, at the very least, minimum essential levels of each of the rights is incumbent upon every State party. Thus, for example, a State party in which any significant number of individuals is deprived of essential foodstuffs, of essential primary health care, of basic shelter and housing, or of the most basic forms of education is, prima facie, failing to discharge its obligations under the Covenant. If the Covenant were to be read in such a way as not to establish such a minimum core obligation, it would be largely deprived of its raison d'être. By the same token, it must be noted that any assessment as to whether a State has discharged its minimum core obligation must also take account of resource constraints applying within the country concerned. Article 2 (1) obligates each State party to take the necessary steps "to the maximum of its available resources". In order for a State party to be able to attribute its failure to meet at least its minimum core obligations to a lack of available resources it must demonstrate that every effort has been made to use all resources that are at its disposition in an effort to satisfy, as a matter of priority, those minimum obligations.

11. The Committee wishes to emphasize, however, that even where the available resources are demonstrably inadequate, the obligation remains for a State party to strive to ensure the widest possible enjoyment of the relevant rights under the prevailing circumstances. Moreover, the obligations to monitor the extent of the realization, or more especially of the non-realization, of economic, social and cultural rights, and to devise strategies and programmes for their promotion, are not in any way eliminated as a result of resource constraints. The Committee has already dealt with these issues in its General Comment 1 (1989).

12. Similarly, the Committee underlines the fact that even in times of severe resources constraints whether caused by a process of adjustment, of economic recession, or by other factors the vulnerable members of society can and indeed must be protected by the adoption of relatively low-cost targeted programmes. In support of this approach the Committee takes note of the analysis prepared by UNICEF entitled "Adjustment with a human face: protecting the vulnerable and promoting growth, 1/ the analysis by UNDP in its Human Development Report 1990 2/ and the analysis by the World Bank in the World Development Report 1990. 3/

13. A final element of article 2 (1), to which attention must be drawn, is that the undertaking given by all States parties is "to take steps, individually and through international assistance and cooperation, especially economic and technical ...". The Committee notes that the phrase "to the maximum of its available resources" was intended by the drafters of the Covenant to refer to both the resources existing within a State and those

available from the international community through international cooperation and assistance. Moreover, the essential role of such cooperation in facilitating the full realization of the relevant rights is further underlined by the specific provisions contained in articles 11, 15, 22 and 23. With respect to article 22 the Committee has already drawn attention, in General Comment 2 (1990), to some of the opportunities and responsibilities that exist in relation to international cooperation. Article 23 also specifically identifies "the furnishing of technical assistance" as well as other activities, as being among the means of "international action for the achievement of the rights recognized ...".

14. The Committee wishes to emphasize that in accordance with Articles 55 and 56 of the Charter of the United Nations, with well-established principles of international law, and with the provisions of the Covenant itself, international cooperation for development and thus for the realization of economic, social and cultural rights is an obligation of all States. It is particularly incumbent upon those States which are in a position to assist others in this regard. The Committee notes in particular the importance of the Declaration on the Right to Development adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 41/128 of 4 December 1986 and the need for States parties to take full account of all of the principles recognized therein. It emphasizes that, in the absence of an active programme of international assistance and cooperation on the part of all those States that are in a position to undertake one, the full realization of economic, social and cultural rights will remain an unfulfilled aspiration in many countries. In this respect, the Committee also recalls the terms of its General Comment 2 (1990).

Notes

1/ G.A. Cornia, R. Jolly and F. Stewart, eds., Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987.

2/ Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990.

3/ Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990.

GENERAL COMMENT 4 (Sixth session, 1991)*

The right to adequate housing (art. 11 (1) of the Covenant)

1. Pursuant to article 11 (1) of the Covenant, States parties "recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions". The human right to adequate housing, which is thus derived from the right to an adequate standard of living, is of central importance for the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights.

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* Contained in document E/1992/23.

2. The Committee has been able to accumulate a large amount of information pertaining to this right. Since 1979, the Committee and its predecessors have examined 75 reports dealing with the right to adequate housing. The Committee has also devoted a day of general discussion to the issue at each of its third (see E/1989/22, para. 312) and fourth sessions (E/1990/23, paras. 281-285). In addition, the Committee has taken careful note of information generated by the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (1987) including the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 42/191 of 11 December 1987. 1/ The Committee has also reviewed relevant reports and other documentation of the Commission on Human Rights and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. 2/

3. Although a wide variety of international instruments address the different dimensions of the right to adequate housing 3/ article 11 (1) of the Covenant is the most comprehensive and perhaps the most important of the relevant provisions.

4. Despite the fact that the international community has frequently reaffirmed the importance of full respect for the right to adequate housing, there remains a disturbingly large gap between the standards set in article 11 (1) of the Covenant and the situation prevailing in many parts of the world. While the problems are often particularly acute in some developing countries which confront major resource and other constraints, the Committee observes that significant problems of homelessness and inadequate housing also exist in some of the most economically developed societies. The United Nations estimates that there are over 100 million persons homeless worldwide and over 1 billion inadequately housed. 4/ There is no indication that this number is decreasing. It seems clear that no State party is free of significant problems of one kind or another in relation to the right to housing.

5. In some instances, the reports of States parties examined by the Committee have acknowledged and described difficulties in ensuring the right to adequate housing. For the most part, however, the information provided has been insufficient to enable the Committee to obtain an adequate picture of the situation prevailing in the State concerned. This General Comment thus aims to identify some of the principal issues which the Committee considers to be important in relation to this right.

6. The right to adequate housing applies to everyone. While the reference to "himself and his family" reflects assumptions as to gender roles and economic activity patterns commonly accepted in 1966 when the Covenant was adopted, the phrase cannot be read today as implying any limitations upon the applicability of the right to individuals or to female-headed households or other such groups. Thus, the concept of "family" must be understood in a wide sense. Further, individuals, as well as families, are entitled to adequate housing regardless of age, economic status, group or other affiliation or status and other such factors. In particular, enjoyment of this right must, in accordance with article 2 (2) of the Covenant, not be subject to any form of discrimination.

7. In the Committee's view, the right to housing should not be interpreted in a narrow or restrictive sense which equates it with, for example, the shelter provided by merely having a roof over one's head or views shelter exclusively as a commodity. Rather it should be seen as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity. This is appropriate for at least two reasons. In the first place, the right to housing is integrally linked to other human rights and to the fundamental principles upon which the Covenant is premised. This "the inherent dignity of the human person" from which the rights in the Covenant are said to derive requires that the term "housing" be interpreted so as to take account of a variety of other considerations, most importantly that the right to housing should be ensured to all persons irrespective of income or access to economic resources. Secondly, the reference in article 11 (1) must be read as referring not just to housing but to adequate housing. As both the Commission on Human Settlements and the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 have stated: "Adequate shelter means ... adequate privacy, adequate space, adequate security, adequate lighting and ventilation, adequate basic infrastructure and adequate location with regard to work and basic facilities - all at a reasonable cost".

8. Thus the concept of adequacy is particularly significant in relation to the right to housing since it serves to underline a number of factors which must be taken into account in determining whether particular forms of shelter can be considered to constitute "adequate housing" for the purposes of the Covenant. While adequacy is determined in part by social, economic, cultural, climatic, ecological and other factors, the Committee believes that it is nevertheless possible to identify certain aspects of the right that must be taken into account for this purpose in any particular context. They include the following:

(a) Legal security of tenure. Tenure takes a variety of forms, including rental (public and private) accommodation, cooperative housing, lease, owner-occupation, emergency housing and informal settlements, including occupation of land or property. Notwithstanding the type of tenure, all persons should possess a degree of security of tenure which guarantees legal protection against forced eviction, harassment and other threats. States parties should consequently take immediate measures aimed at conferring legal security of tenure upon those persons and households currently lacking such protection, in genuine consultation with affected persons and groups;

(b) Availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure. An adequate house must contain certain facilities essential for health, security, comfort and nutrition. All beneficiaries of the right to adequate housing should have sustainable access to natural and common resources, safe drinking water, energy for cooking, heating and lighting, sanitation and washing facilities, means of food storage, refuse disposal, site drainage and emergency services;

(c) Affordability. Personal or household financial costs associated with housing should be at such a level that the attainment and satisfaction of other basic needs are not threatened or compromised. Steps should be taken by States parties to ensure that the percentage of housing-related costs is, in general, commensurate with income levels. States parties should establish housing subsidies for those unable to obtain affordable housing, as well as forms and levels of housing finance which adequately reflect housing needs. In accordance with the principle of affordability, tenants should be protected by appropriate means against unreasonable rent levels or rent increases. In societies where natural materials constitute the chief sources of building materials for housing, steps should be taken by States parties to ensure the availability of such materials;

(d) Habitability. Adequate housing must be habitable, in terms of providing the inhabitants with adequate space and protecting them from cold, damp, heat, rain, wind or other threats to health, structural hazards, and disease vectors. The physical safety of occupants must be guaranteed as well. The Committee encourages States parties to comprehensively apply the Health Principles of Housing 5/ prepared by WHO which view housing as the environmental factor most frequently associated with conditions for disease in epidemiological analyses; i.e. inadequate and deficient housing and living conditions are invariably associated with higher mortality and morbidity rates;

(e) Accessibility. Adequate housing must be accessible to those entitled to it. Disadvantaged groups must be accorded full and sustainable access to adequate housing resources. Thus, such disadvantaged groups as the elderly, children, the physically disabled, the terminally ill, HIV-positive individuals, persons with persistent medical problems, the mentally ill, victims of natural disasters, people living in disaster-prone areas and other groups should be ensured some degree of priority consideration in the housing sphere. Both housing law and policy should take fully into account the special housing needs of these groups. Within many States parties increasing access to land by landless or impoverished segments of the society should constitute a central policy goal. Discernible governmental obligations need to be developed aiming to substantiate the right of all to a secure place to live in peace and dignity, including access to land as an entitlement;

(f) Location. Adequate housing must be in a location which allows access to employment options, health-care services, schools, child-care centres and other social facilities. This is true both in large cities and in rural areas where the temporal and financial costs of getting to and from the place of work can place excessive demands upon the budgets of poor households. Similarly, housing should not be built on polluted sites nor in immediate proximity to pollution sources that threaten the right to health of the inhabitants;

(g) Cultural adequacy. The way housing is constructed, the building materials used and the policies supporting these must appropriately enable the expression of cultural identity and diversity of housing. Activities geared towards development or modernization in the housing sphere should ensure that the cultural dimensions of housing are not sacrificed, and that, *inter alia*, modern technological facilities, as appropriate are also ensured.

9. As noted above, the right to adequate housing cannot be viewed in isolation from other human rights contained in the two International Covenants and other applicable international instruments. Reference has already been made in this regard to the concept of human dignity and the principle of

non-discrimination. In addition, the full enjoyment of other rights - such as the right to freedom of expression, the right to freedom of association (such as for tenants and other community-based groups), the right to freedom of residence and the right to participate in public decision-making - is indispensable if the right to adequate housing is to be realized and maintained by all groups in society. Similarly, the right not to be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with one's privacy, family, home or correspondence constitutes a very important dimension in defining the right to adequate housing.

10. Regardless of the state of development of any country, there are certain steps which must be taken immediately. As recognized in the Global Strategy for Shelter and in other international analyses, many of the measures required to promote the right to housing would only require the abstention by the Government from certain practices and a commitment to facilitating "self-help" by affected groups. To the extent that any such steps are considered to be beyond the maximum resources available to a State party, it is appropriate that a request be made as soon as possible for international cooperation in accordance with articles 11 (1), 22 and 23 of the Covenant, and that the Committee be informed thereof.

11. States parties must give due priority to those social groups living in unfavourable conditions by giving them particular consideration. Policies and legislation should correspondingly not be designed to benefit already advantaged social groups at the expense of others. The Committee is aware that external factors can affect the right to a continuous improvement of living conditions, and that in many States parties overall living conditions declined during the 1980s. However, as noted by the Committee in its General Comment 2 (1990) (E/1990/23, annex III), despite externally caused problems, the obligations under the Covenant continue to apply and are perhaps even more pertinent during times of economic contraction. It would thus appear to the Committee that a general decline in living and housing conditions, directly attributable to policy and legislative decisions by States parties, and in the absence of accompanying compensatory measures, would be inconsistent with the obligations under the Covenant.

12. While the most appropriate means of achieving the full realization of the right to adequate housing will inevitably vary significantly from one State party to another, the Covenant clearly requires that each State party take whatever steps are necessary for that purpose. This will almost invariably require the adoption of a national housing strategy which, as stated in paragraph 32 of the Global Strategy for Shelter, "defines the objectives for the development of shelter conditions, identifies the resources available to meet these goals and the most cost-effective way of using them and sets out the responsibilities and time-frame for the implementation of the necessary measures". Both for reasons of relevance and effectiveness, as well as in order to ensure respect for other human rights, such a strategy should reflect extensive genuine consultation with, and participation by, all of those affected, including the homeless, the inadequately housed and their representatives. Furthermore, steps should be taken to ensure coordination between ministries and regional and local authorities in order to reconcile related policies (economics, agriculture, environment, energy, etc.) with the obligations under article 11 of the Covenant.

13. Effective monitoring of the situation with respect to housing is another obligation of immediate effect. For a State party to satisfy its obligations under article 11 (1) it must demonstrate, inter alia, that it has taken whatever steps are necessary, either alone or on the basis of international cooperation, to ascertain the full extent of homelessness and inadequate housing within its jurisdiction. In this regard, the revised general guidelines regarding the form and contents of reports adopted by the Committee (E/C.12/1991/1) emphasize the need to "provide detailed information about those groups within ... society that are vulnerable and disadvantaged with regard to housing". They include, in particular, homeless persons and families, those inadequately housed and without ready access to basic amenities, those living in "illegal" settlements, those subject to forced evictions and low-income groups.

14. Measures designed to satisfy a State party's obligations in respect of the right to adequate housing may reflect whatever mix of public and private sector measures considered appropriate. While in some States public financing of housing might most usefully be spent on direct construction of new housing, in most cases, experience has shown the inability of Governments to fully satisfy housing deficits with publicly built housing. The promotion by States parties of "enabling strategies", combined with a full commitment to obligations under the right to adequate housing, should thus be encouraged. In essence, the obligation is to demonstrate that, in aggregate, the measures being taken are sufficient to realize the right for every individual in the shortest possible time in accordance with the maximum of available resources.

15. Many of the measures that will be required will involve resource allocations and policy initiatives of a general kind. Nevertheless, the role of formal legislative and administrative measures should not be underestimated in this context. The Global Strategy for Shelter (paras. 66-67) has drawn attention to the types of measures that might be taken in this regard and to their importance.

16. In some States, the right to adequate housing is constitutionally entrenched. In such cases the Committee is particularly interested in learning of the legal and practical significance of such an approach. Details of specific cases and of other ways in which entrenchment has proved helpful should thus be provided.

17. The Committee views many component elements of the right to adequate housing as being at least consistent with the provision of domestic legal remedies. Depending on the legal system, such areas might include, but are not limited to: (a) legal appeals aimed at preventing planned evictions or demolitions through the issuance of court-ordered injunctions; (b) legal procedures seeking compensation following an illegal eviction; (c) complaints against illegal actions carried out or supported by landlords (whether public or private) in relation to rent levels, dwelling maintenance, and racial or other forms of discrimination; (d) allegations of any form of discrimination in the allocation and availability of access to housing; and (e) complaints against landlords concerning unhealthy or inadequate housing conditions. In some legal systems it would also be appropriate to explore the possibility of facilitating class action suits in situations involving significantly increased levels of homelessness.

18. In this regard, the Committee considers that instances of forced eviction are prima facie incompatible with the requirements of the Covenant and can only be justified in the most exceptional circumstances, and in accordance with the relevant principles of international law.

19. Finally, article 11 (1) concludes with the obligation of States parties to recognize "the essential importance of international cooperation based on free consent". Traditionally, less than 5 per cent of all international assistance has been directed towards housing or human settlements, and often the manner by which such funding is provided does little to address the housing needs of disadvantaged groups. States parties, both recipients and providers, should ensure that a substantial proportion of financing is devoted to creating conditions leading to a higher number of persons being adequately housed. International financial institutions promoting measures of structural adjustment should ensure that such measures do not compromise the enjoyment of the right to adequate housing. States parties should, when contemplating international financial cooperation, seek to indicate areas relevant to the right to adequate housing where external financing would have the most effect. Such requests should take full account of the needs and views of the affected groups.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 8, addendum (A/43/8/Add.1).

2/ Commission on Human Rights resolutions 1986/36 and 1987/22; reports by Mr. Danilo Türk, Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1990/19, paras. 108-120; E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/17, paras. 137-139); see also Sub-Commission resolution 1991/26.

3/ See, for example, article 25 (1) of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, article 5 (e) (iii) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, article 14 (2) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, article 27 (3) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 10 of the Declaration on Social Progress and Development, section III (8) of the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements, 1976 (Report of Habitat: United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.76.IV.7 and corrigendum), chap. I), article 8 (1) of the Declaration on the Right to Development and the ILO Recommendation Concerning Workers' Housing, 1961 (No. 115).

4/ See footnote 1/.

5/ Geneva, World Health Organization, 1990.

GENERAL COMMENT 5 (Eleventh session, 1994)*

Persons with disabilities

1. The central importance of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in relation to the human rights of persons with disabilities has frequently been underlined by the international community. 1/ Thus a 1992 review by the Secretary-General of the implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons and the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons concluded that "disability is closely linked to economic and social factors" and that "conditions of living in large parts of the world are so desperate that the provision of basic needs for all - food, water, shelter, health protection and education - must form the cornerstone of national programmes". 2/ Even in countries which have a relatively high standard of living, persons with disabilities are very often denied the opportunity to enjoy the full range of economic, social and cultural rights recognized in the Covenant.

2. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the working group which preceded it, have been explicitly called upon by both the General Assembly 3/ and the Commission on Human Rights 4/ to monitor the compliance of States parties to the Covenant with their obligation to ensure the full enjoyment of the relevant rights by persons with disabilities. The Committee's experience to date, however, indicates that States parties have devoted very little attention to this issue in their reports. This appears to be consistent with the Secretary-General's conclusion that "most Governments still lack decisive concerted measures that would effectively improve the situation" of persons with disabilities. 5/ It is therefore appropriate to review, and emphasize, some of the ways in which issues concerning persons with disabilities arise in connection with the obligations contained in the Covenant.

3. There is still no internationally accepted definition of the term "disability". For present purposes, however, it is sufficient to rely on the approach adopted in the Standard Rules of 1993, which state:

> "The term 'disability' summarizes a great number of different functional limitations occurring in any population ... People may be disabled by physical, intellectual or sensory impairment, medical conditions or mental illness. Such impairments, conditions or illnesses may be permanent or transitory in nature." 6/

4. In accordance with the approach adopted in the Standard Rules, this General Comment uses the term "persons with disabilities" rather than the older term "disabled persons". It has been suggested that the latter term might be misinterpreted to imply that the ability of the individual to function as a person has been disabled.

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* Contained in document E/1995/22.

5. The Covenant does not refer explicitly to persons with disabilities. Nevertheless, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and, since the Covenant's provisions apply fully to all members of society, persons with disabilities are clearly entitled to the full range of rights recognized in the Covenant. In addition, in so far as special treatment is necessary, States parties are required to take appropriate measures, to the maximum extent of their available resources, to enable such persons to seek to overcome any disadvantages, in terms of the enjoyment of the rights specified in the Covenant, flowing from their disability. Moreover, the requirement contained in article 2 (2) of the Covenant that the rights "enunciated ... will be exercised without discrimination of any kind" based on certain specified grounds "or other status" clearly applies to discrimination on the grounds of disability.

6. The absence of an explicit, disability-related provision in the Covenant can be attributed to the lack of awareness of the importance of addressing this issue explicitly, rather than only by implication, at the time of the drafting of the Covenant over a quarter of a century ago. More recent international human rights instruments have, however, addressed the issue specifically. They include the Convention on the Rights of the Child (art. 23); the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (art. 18 (4)); and the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 18). Thus it is now very widely accepted that the human rights of persons with disabilities must be protected and promoted through general, as well as specially designed, laws, policies and programmes.

7. In accordance with this approach, the international community has affirmed its commitment to ensuring the full range of human rights for persons with disabilities in the following instruments: (a) the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, which provides a policy framework aimed at promoting "effective measures for prevention of disability, rehabilitation and the realization of the goals of 'full participation' of [persons with disabilities] in social life and development, and of 'equality'"; 7/ (b) the Guidelines for the Establishment and Development of National Coordinating Committees on Disability or Similar Bodies, adopted in 1990; 8/ (c) the Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and for the Improvement of Mental Health Care, adopted in 1991; 9/ (d) the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter referred to as the "Standard Rules"), adopted in 1993, the purpose of which is to ensure that all persons with disabilities "may exercise the same rights and obligations as others". 10/ The Standard Rules are of major importance and constitute a particularly valuable reference guide in identifying more precisely the relevant obligations of States parties under the Covenant.

I. GENERAL OBLIGATIONS OF STATES PARTIES

8. The United Nations has estimated that there are more than 500 million persons with disabilities in the world today. Of that number, 80 per cent live in rural areas in developing countries. Seventy per cent of the total are estimated to have either limited or no access to the services they need.

The challenge of improving the situation of persons with disabilities is thus of direct relevance to every State party to the Covenant. While the means chosen to promote the full realization of the economic, social and cultural rights of this group will inevitably differ significantly from one country to another, there is no country in which a major policy and programme effort is not required. 11/

9. The obligation of States parties to the Covenant to promote progressive realization of the relevant rights to the maximum of their available resources clearly requires Governments to do much more than merely abstain from taking measures which might have a negative impact on persons with disabilities. The obligation in the case of such a vulnerable and disadvantaged group is to take positive action to reduce structural disadvantages and to give appropriate preferential treatment to people with disabilities in order to achieve the objectives of full participation and equality within society for all persons with disabilities. This almost invariably means that additional resources will need to be made available for this purpose and that a wide range of specially tailored measures will be required.

10. According to a report by the Secretary-General, developments over the past decade in both developed and developing countries have been especially unfavourable from the perspective of persons with disabilities:

> "... current economic and social deterioration, marked by low-growth rates, high unemployment, reduced public expenditure, current structural adjustment programmes and privatization, have negatively affected programmes and services ... If the present negative trends continue, there is the risk that [persons with disabilities] may increasingly be relegated to the margins of society, dependent on ad hoc support." 12/

As the Committee has previously observed (General Comment No. 3 (Fifth session, 1990), para. 12), the duty of States parties to protect the vulnerable members of their societies assumes greater rather than less importance in times of severe resource constraints.

11. Given the increasing commitment of Governments around the world to market-based policies, it is appropriate in that context to emphasize certain aspects of States parties' obligations. One is the need to ensure that not only the public sphere, but also the private sphere, are, within appropriate limits, subject to regulation to ensure the equitable treatment of persons with disabilities. In a context in which arrangements for the provision of public services are increasingly being privatized and in which the free market is being relied on to an ever greater extent, it is essential that private employers, private suppliers of goods and services, and other non-public entities be subject to both non-discrimination and equality norms in relation to persons with disabilities. In circumstances where such protection does not extend beyond the public domain, the ability of persons with disabilities to participate in the mainstream of community activities and to realize their full potential as active members of society will be severely and often arbitrarily constrained. This is not to imply that legislative measures will always be the most effective means of seeking to eliminate discrimination within the private sphere. Thus, for example, the Standard Rules place

particular emphasis on the need for States to "take action to raise awareness in society about persons with disabilities, their rights, their needs, their potential and their contribution". 13/

12. In the absence of government intervention there will always be instances in which the operation of the free market will produce unsatisfactory results for persons with disabilities, either individually or as a group, and in such circumstances it is incumbent on Governments to step in and take appropriate measures to temper, complement, compensate for, or override the results produced by market forces. Similarly, while it is appropriate for Governments to rely on private, voluntary groups to assist persons with disabilities in various ways, such arrangements can never absolve Governments from their duty to ensure full compliance with their obligations under the Covenant. As the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons states, "the ultimate responsibility for remedying the conditions that lead to impairment and for dealing with the consequences of disability rests with Governments". 14/

II. MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

13. The methods to be used by States parties in seeking to implement their obligations under the Covenant towards persons with disabilities are essentially the same as those available in relation to other obligations (see General Comment No. 1 (Third session, 1989)). They include the need to ascertain, through regular monitoring, the nature and scope of the problems existing within the State; the need to adopt appropriately tailored policies and programmes to respond to the requirements thus identified; the need to legislate where necessary and to eliminate any existing discriminatory legislation; and the need to make appropriate budgetary provisions or, where necessary, seek international cooperation and assistance. In the latter respect, international cooperation in accordance with articles 22 and 23 of the Covenant is likely to be a particularly important element in enabling some developing countries to fulfil their obligations under the Covenant.

14. In addition, it has been consistently acknowledged by the international community that policy-making and programme implementation in this area should be undertaken on the basis of close consultation with, and involvement of, representative groups of the persons concerned. For this reason, the Standard Rules recommend that everything possible be done to facilitate the establishment of national coordinating committees, or similar bodies, to serve as a national focal point on disability matters. In doing so, Governments should take account of the 1990 Guidelines for the Establishment and Development of National Coordinating Committees on Disability or Similar Bodies. 15/

III. THE OBLIGATION TO ELIMINATE DISCRIMINATION ON THE GROUNDS OF DISABILITY

15. Both de jure and de facto discrimination against persons with disabilities have a long history and take various forms. They range from invidious discrimination, such as the denial of educational opportunities, to more "subtle" forms of discrimination such as segregation and isolation achieved through the imposition of physical and social barriers. For the purposes of the Covenant, "disability-based discrimination" may be defined as

including any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference, or denial of reasonable accommodation based on disability which has the effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of economic, social or cultural rights. Through neglect, ignorance, prejudice and false assumptions, as well as through exclusion, distinction or separation, persons with disabilities have very often been prevented from exercising their economic, social or cultural rights on an equal basis with persons without disabilities. The effects of disability-based discrimination have been particularly severe in the fields of education, employment, housing, transport, cultural life, and access to public places and services.

16. Despite some progress in terms of legislation over the past decade, 16/ the legal situation of persons with disabilities remains precarious. In order to remedy past and present discrimination, and to deter future discrimination, comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation in relation to disability would seem to be indispensable in virtually all States parties. Such legislation should not only provide persons with disabilities with judicial remedies as far as possible and appropriate, but also provide for social-policy programmes which enable persons with disabilities to live an integrated, self-determined and independent life.

17. Anti-discrimination measures should be based on the principle of equal rights for persons with disabilities and the non-disabled, which, in the words of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, "implies that the needs of each and every individual are of equal importance, that these needs must be made the basis for the planning of societies, and that all resources must be employed in such a way as to ensure, for every individual, equal opportunity for participation. Disability policies should ensure the access of [persons with disabilities] to all community services". 17/

18. Because appropriate measures need to be taken to undo existing discrimination and to establish equitable opportunities for persons with disabilities, such actions should not be considered discriminatory in the sense of article 2 (2) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as long as they are based on the principle of equality and are employed only to the extent necessary to achieve that objective.

IV. SPECIFIC PROVISIONS OF THE COVENANT

A. Article 3 - Equal rights for men and women

19. Persons with disabilities are sometimes treated as genderless human beings. As a result, the double discrimination suffered by women with disabilities is often neglected. 18/ Despite frequent calls by the international community for particular emphasis to be placed upon their situation, very few efforts have been undertaken during the Decade. The neglect of women with disabilities is mentioned several times in the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the World Programme of Action. 19/ The Committee therefore urges States parties to address the situation of women with disabilities, with high priority being given in future to the implementation of economic, social and cultural rights-related programmes.

B. Articles 6-8 - Rights relating to work

20. The field of employment is one in which disability-based discrimination has been prominent and persistent. In most countries the unemployment rate among persons with disabilities is two to three times higher than the unemployment rate for persons without disabilities. Where persons with disabilities are employed, they are mostly engaged in low-paid jobs with little social and legal security and are often segregated from the mainstream of the labour market. The integration of persons with disabilities into the regular labour market should be actively supported by States.

21. The "right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts" (art. 6 (1)) is not realized where the only real opportunity open to disabled workers is to work in so-called "sheltered" facilities under substandard conditions. Arrangements whereby persons with a certain category of disability are effectively confined to certain occupations or to the production of certain goods may violate this right. Similarly, in the light of principle 13 (3) of the Principles for the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness and for the Improvement of Mental Health Care, 20/ "therapeutical treatment" in institutions which amounts to forced labour is also incompatible with the Covenant. In this regard, the prohibition on forced labour contained in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is also of potential relevance.

22. According to the Standard Rules, persons with disabilities, whether in rural or urban areas, must have equal opportunities for productive and gainful employment in the labour market. 21/ For this to happen it is particularly important that artificial barriers to integration in general, and to employment in particular, be removed. As the International Labour Organisation has noted, it is very often the physical barriers that society has erected in areas such as transport, housing and the workplace which are then cited as the reason why persons with disabilities cannot be employed. 22/ For example, as long as workplaces are designed and built in ways that make them inaccessible to wheelchairs, employers will be able to "justify" their failure to employ wheelchair users. Governments should also develop policies which promote and regulate flexible and alternative work arrangements that reasonably accommodate the needs of disabled workers.

23. Similarly, the failure of Governments to ensure that modes of transportation are accessible to persons with disabilities greatly reduces the chances of such persons finding suitable, integrated jobs, taking advantage of educational and vocational training, or commuting to facilities of all types. Indeed, the provision of access to appropriate and, where necessary, specially tailored forms of transportation is crucial to the realization by persons with disabilities of virtually all the rights recognized in the Covenant.

24. The "technical and vocational guidance and training programmes" required under article 6 (2) of the Covenant should reflect the needs of all persons with disabilities, take place in integrated settings, and be planned and implemented with the full involvement of representatives of persons with disabilities.

25. The right to "the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work" (art. 7) applies to all disabled workers, whether they work in sheltered facilities or in the open labour market. Disabled workers may not be discriminated against with respect to wages or other conditions if their work is equal to that of non-disabled workers. States parties have a responsibility to ensure that disability is not used as an excuse for creating low standards of labour protection or for paying below minimum wages.

26. Trade union-related rights (art. 8) apply equally to workers with disabilities and regardless of whether they work in special work facilities or in the open labour market. In addition, article 8, read in conjunction with other rights such as the right to freedom of association, serves to emphasize the importance of the right of persons with disabilities to form their own organizations. If these organizations are to be effective in "the promotion and protection of [the] economic and social interests" (art. 8 (1) (a)) of such persons, they should be consulted regularly by government bodies and others in relation to all matters affecting them; it may also be necessary that they be supported financially and otherwise so as to ensure their viability.

27. The International Labour Organization has developed valuable and comprehensive instruments with respect to the work-related rights of persons with disabilities, including in particular Convention No. 159 (1983) concerning vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities. 23/ The Committee encourages States parties to the Covenant to consider ratifying that Convention.

C. Article 9 - Social security

28. Social security and income-maintenance schemes are of particular importance for persons with disabilities. As stated in the Standard Rules, "States should ensure the provision of adequate income support to persons with disabilities who, owing to disability or disability-related factors, have temporarily lost or received a reduction in their income or have been denied employment opportunities". 24/ Such support should reflect the special needs for assistance and other expenses often associated with disability. In addition, as far as possible, the support provided should also cover individuals (who are overwhelmingly female) who undertake the care of a person with disabilities. Such persons, including members of the families of persons with disabilities, are often in urgent need of financial support because of their assistance role. 25/

29. Institutionalization of persons with disabilities, unless rendered necessary for other reasons, cannot be regarded as an adequate substitute for the social security and income-support rights of such persons.

D. Article 10 - Protection of the family and of mothers and children

30. In the case of persons with disabilities, the Covenant's requirement that "protection and assistance" be rendered to the family means that everything possible should be done to enable such persons, when they so wish, to live

with their families. Article 10 also implies, subject to the general principles of international human rights law, the right of persons with disabilities to marry and have their own family. These rights are frequently ignored or denied, especially in the case of persons with mental disabilities. 26/ In this and other contexts, the term "family" should be interpreted broadly and in accordance with appropriate local usage. States parties should ensure that laws and social policies and practices do not impede the realization of these rights. Persons with disabilities should have access to necessary counselling services in order to fulfil their rights and duties within the family. 27/

31. Women with disabilities also have the right to protection and support in relation to motherhood and pregnancy. As the Standard Rules state, "persons with disabilities must not be denied the opportunity to experience their sexuality, have sexual relationships and experience parenthood". 28/ The needs and desires in question should be recognized and addressed in both the recreational and the procreational contexts. These rights are commonly denied to both men and women with disabilities worldwide. 29/ Both the sterilization of, and the performance of an abortion on, a woman with disabilities without her prior informed consent are serious violations of article 10 (2).

32. Children with disabilities are especially vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and neglect and are, in accordance with article 10 (3) of the Covenant (reinforced by the corresponding provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child), entitled to special protection.

E. Article 11 - The right to an adequate standard of living

33. In addition to the need to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to adequate food, accessible housing and other basic material needs, it is also necessary to ensure that "support services, including assistive devices" are available "for persons with disabilities, to assist them to increase their level of independence in their daily living and to exercise their rights". 30/ The right to adequate clothing also assumes a special significance in the context of persons with disabilities who have particular clothing needs, so as to enable them to function fully and effectively in society. Wherever possible, appropriate personal assistance should also be provided in this connection. Such assistance should be undertaken in a manner and spirit which fully respect the human rights of the person(s) concerned. Similarly, as already noted by the Committee in paragraph 8 of General Comment No. 4 (Sixth session, 1991), the right to adequate housing includes the right to accessible housing for persons with disabilities.

F. Article 12 - The right to physical and mental health

34. According to the Standard Rules, "States should ensure that persons with disabilities, particularly infants and children, are provided with the same level of medical care within the same system as other members of society". 31/ The right to physical and mental health also implies the right to have access to, and to benefit from, those medical and social

services - including orthopaedic devices - which enable persons with disabilities to become independent, prevent further disabilities and support their social integration. 32/ Similarly, such persons should be provided with rehabilitation services which would enable them "to reach and sustain their optimum level of independence and functioning". 33/ All such services should be provided in such a way that the persons concerned are able to maintain full respect for their rights and dignity.

G. Articles 13 and 14 - The right to education

35. School programmes in many countries today recognize that persons with disabilities can best be educated within the general education system. 34/ Thus the Standard Rules provide that "States should recognize the principle of equal primary, secondary and tertiary educational opportunities for children, youth and adults with disabilities, in integrated settings". 35/ In order to implement such an approach, States should ensure that teachers are trained to educate children with disabilities within regular schools and that the necessary equipment and support are available to bring persons with disabilities up to the same level of education as their non-disabled peers. In the case of deaf children, for example, sign language should be recognized as a separate language to which the children should have access and whose importance should be acknowledged in their overall social environment.

H. Article 15 - The right to take part in cultural life and enjoy the benefits of scientific progress

36. The Standard Rules provide that "States should ensure that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to utilize their creative, artistic and intellectual potential, not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of their community, be they in urban or rural areas. ... States should promote the accessibility to and availability of places for cultural performances and services ... ". 36/ The same applies to places for recreation, sports and tourism.

37. The right to full participation in cultural and recreational life for persons with disabilities further requires that communication barriers be eliminated to the greatest extent possible. Useful measures in this regard might include "the use of talking books, papers written in simple language and with clear format and colours for persons with mental disability, [and] adapted television and theatre for deaf persons". 37/

38. In order to facilitate the equal participation in cultural life of persons with disabilities, Governments should inform and educate the general public about disability. In particular, measures must be taken to dispel prejudices or superstitious beliefs against persons with disabilities, for example those that view epilepsy as a form of spirit possession or a child with disabilities as a form of punishment visited upon the family. Similarly, the general public should be educated to accept that persons with disabilities have as much right as any other person to make use of restaurants, hotels, recreation centres and cultural venues.

Notes

1/ For a comprehensive review of the question, see the final report prepared by Mr Leandro Despouy, Special Rapporteur, on human rights and disability (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/31).

2/ See A/47/415, para. 5.

3/ See para. 165 of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons, adopted by the General Assembly by its resolution 37/52 of 3 December 1982 (para. 1).

4/ See Commission on Human Rights resolutions 1992/48, para. 4 and 1993/29, para. 7.

5/ See A/47/415, para. 6.

6/ Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, annexed to General Assembly resolution 48/96 of 20 December 1993 (Introduction, para. 17).

7/ World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (see note 3 above), para. 1.

8/ A/C.3/46/4, annex I. Also contained in the Report on the International Meeting on the Roles and Functions of National Coordinating Committees on Disability in Developing Countries, Beijing, 5-11 November 1990 (CSDHA/DDP/NDC/4). See also Economic and Social Council resolution 1991/8 and General Assembly resolution 46/96 of 16 December 1991.

9/ General Assembly resolution 46/119 of 17 December 1991, annex.

10/ Standard Rules, (see note 6 above), Introduction, para. 15.

11/ See A/47/415, *passim*.

12/ Ibid., para. 5.

13/ Standard Rules, (see note 6 above) Rule 1.

14/ World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (see note 3 above), para. 3.

15/ See note 8 above.

16/ See A/47/415, paras. 37-38.

17/ World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (see note 3 above), para. 25.

18/ See E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/31 (see note 1 above), para. 140.

19/ See A/47/415, paras. 35, 46, 74 and 77.

20/ See note 9 above.

21/ Standard Rules (see note 6 above), Rule 7.

22/ See A/CONF.157/PC/61/Add.10, p. 12.

23/ See also Recommendation No. 99 (1955) concerning vocational rehabilitation of the disabled, and Recommendation No. 168 (1983) concerning vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities.

24/ Standard Rules (see note 6 above) Rule 8, para. 1.

25/ See A/47/415, para. 78.

26/ See E/CN.4/Sub.2/1991/31 (see note 1 above), paras. 190 and 193.

27/ See the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (see note 3 above) para. 74.

28/ Standard Rules (see note 6 above), Rule 9, para. 2.

29/ See E/CN.6/1991/2, paras. 14 and 59-68.

30/ Standard Rules (see note 6 above), Rule 4.

31/ Ibid., Rule 2, para. 3.

32/ See the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (General Assembly resolution 3447 (XXX) of 9 December 1975), para. 6; and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (see note 3 above), paras. 95-107.

33/ Standard Rules (see note 6 above), Rule 3.

34/ See A/47/415 para. 73.

35/ Standard Rules (see note 6 above), Rule 6.

36/ Ibid., Rule 10, paras. 1-2.

37/ See A/47/415 para. 79.

GENERAL COMMENT 6 (Thirteenth session, 1995)*

The economic, social and cultural rights of older persons

1. Introduction

1. The world population is ageing at a steady, quite spectacular rate. The total number of persons aged 60 and above rose from 200 million in 1950 to 400 million in 1982 and is projected to reach 600 million in the year 2001 and 1.2 billion by the year 2025, at which time over 70 per cent of them will be living in what are today's developing countries. The number of people aged 80 and above has grown and continues to grow even more dramatically, going from 13 million in 1950 to over 50 million today and projected to increase to 137 million in 2025. This is the fastest growing population group in the world, projected to increase by a factor of 10 between 1950 and 2025, compared with a factor of six for the group aged 60 and above and a factor of little more than three for the total population. 1/

2. These figures are illustrations of a quiet revolution, but one which has far-reaching and unpredictable consequences and which is now affecting the social and economic structures of societies both at the world level and at the country level, and will affect them even more in future.

3. Most of the States parties to the Covenant, and the industrialized countries in particular, are faced with the task of adapting their social and economic policies to the ageing of their populations, especially as regards social security. In the developing countries, the absence or deficiencies of social security coverage are being aggravated by the emigration of the younger members of the population and the consequent weakening of the traditional role of the family, the main support of older people.

2. Internationally endorsed policies in relation to older persons

4. In 1982 the World Assembly on Ageing adopted the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing. This important document was endorsed by the General Assembly and is a very useful guide, for it details the measures that should be taken by Member States to safeguard the rights of older persons within the context of the rights proclaimed by the International Covenants on Human Rights. It contains 62 recommendations, many of which are of direct relevance to the Covenant. 2/

5. In 1991 the General Assembly adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons which, because of their programmatic nature, is also an important document in the present context. 3/ It is divided into five sections which correlate closely to the rights recognized in the Covenant. "Independence" includes access to adequate food, water, shelter, clothing and health care. To these basic rights are added the opportunity to remunerated work and access to education and training. By "participation" is meant

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* Contained in document E/1996/22.

that older persons should participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies that affect their well-being and share their knowledge and skills with younger generations, and should be able to form movements and associations. The section headed "care" proclaims that older persons should benefit from family care, health care and be able to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms when residing in a shelter, care or treatment facility. With regard to "self-fulfilment", the Principles that older persons should pursue opportunities for the full development of their potential through access to the educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources of their societies. Lastly, the section entitled "dignity" states that older persons should be able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse, should be treated fairly, regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, disability, financial situation or any other status, and be valued independently of their economic contribution.

6. In 1992, the General Assembly adopted eight global targets on ageing for the year 2001 and a brief guide for setting national targets. In a number of important respects, these global targets serve to reinforce the obligations of States parties to the Covenant. 4/

7. Also in 1992, and in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Vienna International Plan of Action by the Conference on Ageing, the General Assembly adopted the Proclamation on Ageing in which it urged support of national initiatives on ageing so that older women are given adequate support for their largely unrecognized contributions to society and older men are encouraged to develop social, cultural and emotional capacities which they may have been prevented from developing during breadwinning years; families are supported in providing care and all family members encouraged to cooperate in caregiving; and that international cooperation is expanded in the context of the strategies for reaching the global targets on ageing for the year 2001. It also proclaimed the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons in recognition of humanity's demographic "coming of age". 5/

8. The United Nations specialized agencies, especially the International Labour Organization, have also given attention to the problem of ageing in their respective fields of competence.

3. The rights of older persons in relation to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

9. The terminology used to describe older persons varies considerably, even in international documents. It includes: "older persons", "the aged", "the elderly", "the third age", "the ageing", and, to denote persons more than 80 years of age, "the fourth age". The Committee opted for "older persons" (in French, *personnes âgées*; in Spanish, *personas mayores*), the term employed in General Assembly resolutions 47/5 and 48/98. According to the practice in the United Nations statistical services, these terms cover persons aged 60 and above (Eurostat, the statistical service of the European Union, considers "older persons" to mean persons aged 65 or above, since 65 is the most common age of retirement and the trend is towards later retirement still).

10. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights does not contain any explicit reference to the rights of older persons, although article 9 dealing with "the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance", implicitly recognizes the right to old-age benefits. Nevertheless, in view of the fact that the Covenant's provisions apply fully to all members of society, it is clear that older persons are entitled to enjoy the full range of rights recognized in the Covenant. This approach is also fully reflected in the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing. Moreover, in so far as respect for the rights of older persons requires special measures to be taken, States parties are required by the Covenant to do so to the maximum of their available resources.

11. Another important issue is whether discrimination on the basis of age is Prohibited by the Covenant. Neither the Covenant nor the Universal Declaration of Human Rights refers explicitly to age as one of the prohibited grounds. Rather than being seen as an intentional exclusion, this omission is probably best explained by the fact that, when these instruments were adopted, the problem of demographic ageing was not as evident or as pressing as it is now.

12. This is not determinative of the matter, however, since the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of "other status" could be interpreted as applying to age. The Committee notes that while it may not yet be possible to conclude that discrimination on the grounds of age is comprehensively prohibited by the Covenant, the range of matters in relation to which such discrimination can be accepted is very limited. Moreover, it must be emphasized that the unacceptableness of discrimination against older persons is underlined in many international policy documents and is confirmed in the legislation of the vast majority of States. In the few areas in which discrimination continues to be tolerated, such as in relation to mandatory retirement ages or access to tertiary education, there is a clear trend towards the elimination of such barriers. The Committee is of the view that States parties should seek to expedite this trend to the greatest extent possible.

13. Accordingly, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is of the view that States parties to the Covenant are obligated to pay particular attention to promoting and protecting the economic, social and cultural rights of older persons. The Committee's own role in this regard is rendered all the more important by the fact that, unlike the case of other population groups such as women and children, no comprehensive international convention yet exists in relation to the rights of older persons and no binding supervisory arrangements attach to the various sets of United Nations principles in this area.

14. By the end of its thirteenth session, the Committee and, before that, its predecessor, the Sessional Working Group of Governmental Experts, had examined 144 initial reports, 70 second periodic reports and 20 initial and periodic global reports on articles 1 to 15. This examination made it possible to identify many of the problems that may be encountered in implementing the Covenant in a considerable number of States parties that represent all the regions of the world and have different political, socio-economic and cultural systems. The reports examined to date have not provided any information in a

systematic way on the situation of older persons with regard to compliance with the Covenant, apart from information, of varying completeness, on the implementation of article 9 relating to the right to social security.

15. In 1993, the Committee devoted a day of general discussion to this issue in order to plan its future activity in this area. Moreover, it has, at recent sessions, begun to attach substantially more importance to information on the rights of older persons and its questioning has elicited some very valuable information in some instances. Nevertheless, the Committee notes that the great majority of States parties reports continue to make little reference to this important issue. It therefore wishes to indicate that, in future, it will insist that the situation of older persons in relation to each of the rights recognized in the Covenant should be adequately addressed in all reports. The remainder of this General Comment identifies the specific issues which are relevant in this regard.

4. General obligations of States parties

16. Older persons as a group are as heterogeneous and varied as the rest of the population and their situation depends on a country's economic and social situation, on demographic, environmental cultural and employment factors and, at the individual level, on the family situation, the level of education, the urban or rural environment and the occupation of workers and retirees.

17. Side by side with older persons who are in good health and whose financial situation is acceptable, there are many who do not have adequate means of support, even in developed countries, and who feature prominently among the most vulnerable, marginal and unprotected groups. In times of recession and of restructuring of the economy, older persons are particularly at risk. As the Committee has previously stressed (General Comment No. 3 (1990), para. 12), even in times of severe resource constraints, States parties have the duty to protect the vulnerable members of society.

18. The methods that States parties use to fulfil the obligations they have assumed under the Covenant in respect of older persons will be basically the same as those for the fulfilment of other obligations (see General Comment No. 1 (1989)). They include the need to determine the nature and scope of problems within a State through regular monitoring, the need to adopt properly designed policies and programmes to meet requirements, the need to enact legislation when necessary and to eliminate any discriminatory legislation and the need to ensure the relevant budget support or, as appropriate, to request international cooperation. In the latter connection, international cooperation in accordance with articles 22 and 23 of the Covenant may be a particularly important way of enabling some developing countries to fulfil their obligations under the Covenant.

19. In this context, attention may be drawn to Global target No. 1, adopted by the General Assembly in 1992, which calls for the establishment of national support infrastructures to promote policies and programmes on ageing in national and international development plans and programmes. In this regard, the Committee notes that one of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons which Governments were encouraged to incorporate into their national programmes is that older persons should be able to form movements or associations of older persons.

5. Specific provisions of the Covenant

Article 3: Equal rights of men and women

20. In accordance with article 3 of the Covenant, by which States parties undertake "to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights", the Committee considers that States parties should pay particular attention to older women who, because they have spent all or part of their lives caring for their families without engaging in a remunerated activity entitling them to an old-age pension, and who are also not entitled to a widow's pension, are often in critical situations.

21. To deal with such situations and comply fully with article 9 of the Covenant and paragraph 2 (h) of the Proclamation on Ageing, States parties should institute non-contributory old-age benefits or other assistance for all persons, regardless of their sex, who find themselves without resources on attaining an age specified in national legislation. Given their greater life expectancy and the fact that it is more often they who have no contributory pensions, women would be the principal beneficiaries.

Articles 6 to 8: Rights relating to work

22. Article 6 of the Covenant requires States parties to take appropriate steps to safeguard the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain a living by work which is freely chosen or accepted. In this regard, the Committee, bearing in mind that older workers who have not reached retirement age often encounter problems in finding and keeping jobs, stresses the need for measures to prevent discrimination on grounds of age in employment and occupation. 6/

23. The right "to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work" (Covenant, art. 7) is of special importance for ensuring that older workers enjoy safe working conditions until their retirement. In particular, it is desirable, to employ older workers in circumstances in which the best use can be made of their experience and know-how. 7/

24. In the years preceding retirement, retirement preparation programmes should be implemented, with the participation of representative organizations of employers and workers and other bodies concerned, to prepare older workers to cope with their new situation. Such programmes should, in particular, provide older workers with information about: their rights and obligations as pensioners; the opportunities and conditions for continuing an occupational activity or undertaking voluntary work; means of combating detrimental effects of ageing; facilities for adult education and cultural activities, and the use of leisure time. 8/

25. The rights protected by article 8 of the Covenant, namely, trade union rights, including after retirement age, must be applied to older workers.

Article 9: Right to social security

26. Article 9 of the Covenant provides generally that States parties "recognize the right of everyone to social security", without specifying the type or level of protection to be guaranteed. However, the term "social security" implicitly covers all the risks involved in the loss of means of subsistence for reasons beyond a person's control.

27. In accordance with article 9 of the Covenant and the provisions concerning implementation of the ILO social security conventions - Convention No. 102 concerning Social Security (Minimum Standards) (1952) and Convention No. 128 concerning Invalidity, Old-Age and Survivors' Benefits (1967) - States parties must take appropriate measures to establish general regimes of compulsory old-age insurance, starting at a particular age, to be prescribed by national law.

28. In keeping with the recommendations contained in the two ILO Conventions mentioned above and Recommendation No. 162, the Committee invites States parties to establish retirement age so that it is flexible, depending on the occupations performed and the working ability of elderly persons, with due regard to demographic, economic and social factors.

29. In order to give effect to the provisions of article 9 of the Covenant, States parties must guarantee the provision of survivors' and orphans' benefits on the death of the breadwinner who was covered by social security or receiving a pension.

30. Furthermore, as already observed in paragraphs 20 and 21, in order fully to implement the provisions of article 9 of the Covenant, States parties should, within the limits of available resources, provide non-contributory old-age benefits and other assistance for all older persons, who, when reaching the age prescribed in national legislation, have not completed a qualifying period of contribution and are not entitled to an old-age pension or other social security benefit or assistance and have no other source of income.

Article 10: Protection of the family

31. On the basis of article 10, paragraph 1, of the Covenant and recommendations 25 and 29 of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, States parties should make all the necessary efforts to support, protect and strengthen the family and help it, in accordance with each society's system of cultural values, to respond to the needs of its dependent ageing members. Recommendation 29 encourages Governments and non-governmental organizations to establish social services to support the whole family when there are elderly people at home and to implement measures especially for low-income families who wish to keep elderly people at home. This assistance should also be provided for persons living alone or elderly couples wishing to remain at home.

Article 11: Right to an adequate standard of living

32. Of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, principle 1, which stands at the beginning of the section relating to the independence of older persons, provides that: "Older persons should have access to adequate food, water, shelter, clothing and health care through the provision of income, family and community support and self-help". The Committee attaches great importance to this principle, which demands for older persons the rights contained in article 11 of the Covenant.

33. Recommendations 19 to 24 of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing emphasize that housing for the elderly must be viewed as more than mere shelter and that, in addition to the physical, it has psychological and social significance which should be taken into account. Accordingly, national policies should help elderly persons to continue to live in their own homes as long as possible, through the restoration, development and improvement of homes and their adaptation to the ability of those persons to gain access to and use them (recommendation 19). Recommendation 20 stresses the need for urban rebuilding and development planning and law to pay special attention to the problems of the ageing, assisting in securing their social integration, while recommendation 22 draws attention to the need to take account of the functional capacity of the elderly in order to provide them with a better living environment and facilitate mobility and communication through the provision of adequate means of transport.

Article 12: Right to physical and mental health

34. With a view to the realization of the right of elderly persons to the enjoyment of a satisfactory standard of physical and mental health, in accordance with article 12, paragraph 1, of the Covenant, States parties should take account of the content of recommendations 1 to 17 of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, which focus entirely on providing guidelines on health policy to preserve the health of the elderly and take a comprehensive view, ranging from prevention and rehabilitation to the care of the terminally ill.

35. Clearly, the growing number of chronic, degenerative diseases and the high hospitalization costs they involve cannot be dealt with only by curative treatment. In this regard, States parties should bear in mind that maintaining health into old age requires investments during the entire life span, basically through the adoption of healthy lifestyles (food, exercise, elimination of tobacco and alcohol, etc.). Prevention, through regular checks suited to the needs of the elderly, plays a decisive role, as does rehabilitation, by maintaining the functional capacities of elderly persons, with a resulting decrease in the cost of investments in health care and social services.

Articles 13 to 15: Right to education and culture

36. Article 13, paragraph 1, of the Covenant recognizes the right of everyone to education. In the case of the elderly, this right must be approached from two different and complementary points of view: (a) the right of elderly persons to benefit from educational programmes; and (b) making the know-how and experience of elderly persons available to younger generations.

37. With regard to the former, States parties should take account of: (a) the recommendations in principle 16 of the United Nations Principles for Older Persons to the effect that older persons should have access to suitable education programmes and training and should, therefore, on the basis of their preparation, abilities and motivation, be given access to the various levels of education through the adoption of appropriate measures regarding literacy training, life-long education, access to university, etc.; and (b) recommendation 47 of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing,

which, in accordance with the concept of life-long education promulgated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), recommends informal, community-based and recreation-oriented programmes for the elderly in order to develop their sense of self-reliance and the community's sense of responsibility. Such programmes should enjoy the support of national Governments and international organizations.

38. With regard to the use of the know-how and experience of older persons, as referred to in the part of the recommendations of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing dealing with education (paras. 74-76), attention is drawn to the important role that elderly and old persons still play in most societies as the transmitters of information, knowledge, traditions and spiritual values and to the fact that this important tradition should not be lost. Consequently, the Committee attaches particular importance to the message contained in recommendation 44 of the Plan: "Educational programmes featuring the elderly as the teachers and transmitters of knowledge, culture and spiritual values should be developed".

39. In article 15, paragraphs 1 (a) and (b), of the Covenant, States parties recognize the right of everyone to take part in cultural life and to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications. In this respect, the Committee urges States parties to take account of the recommendations contained in the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, and in particular of principle 7: "Older persons should remain integrated in society, participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies that directly affect their well-being and share their knowledge and skills with younger generations"; and principle 16: "Older persons should have access to the educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources of society".

40. Similarly, recommendation 48 of the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing encourages Governments and international organizations to support programmes aimed at providing the elderly with easier physical access to cultural institutions (museums, theatres, concert halls, cinemas, etc.).

41. Recommendation 50 stresses the need for Governments, non-governmental organizations and the ageing themselves to make efforts to overcome negative stereotyped images of older persons as suffering from physical and psychological disabilities, incapable of functioning independently and having neither role nor status in society. These efforts, in which the media and educational institutions should also take part, are essential for achieving a society that champions the full integration of the elderly.

42. With regard to the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications, States parties should take account of recommendations 60, 61 and 62 of the Vienna International Plan of Action and make efforts to promote research on the biological, mental and social aspects of ageing and ways of maintaining functional capacities and preventing and delaying the start of chronic illnesses and disabilities. In this connection, it is recommended that States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations should establish institutions specializing in the teaching of gerontology, geriatrics and geriatric psychology in countries where such institutions do not exist.

Notes

1/ Global targets on ageing for the year 2001: a practical strategy. Report of the Secretary-General (A/47/339), para. 5.

2/ Report of the World Assembly on Ageing, Vienna, 26 July-6 August 1982; (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.82.I.16).

3/ General Assembly resolution 46/91 of 16 December 1991, "Implementation of the International Plan of Action on Ageing and related activities", annex.

4/ Global targets on ageing for the year 2001: a practical strategy (A/47/339), chapters III and IV.

5/ General Assembly resolution 47/5 of 16 October 1992, "Proclamation on Ageing".

6/ See ILO Recommendation 162 (1980) concerning Older Workers, paras. 3-10.

7/ Ibid., paras. 11-19.

8/ Ibid., para. 30.

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III

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

According to article 9, paragraph 2, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Committee may make suggestions and general recommendations based on the examination of the reports and information received from the States parties. Such suggestions and general recommendations shall be reported to the General Assembly together with comments, if any, from States parties. The Committee has so far adopted a total of 18 general recommendations.

General Recommendation I (Fifth session, 1972)*

On the basis of the consideration at its fifth session of reports submitted by States parties under article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Committee found that the legislation of a number of States parties did not include the provisions envisaged in article 4 (a) and (b) of the Convention, the implementation of which (with due regard to the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the rights expressly set forth in article 5 of the Convention) is obligatory under the Convention for all States parties.

The Committee accordingly recommends that the States parties whose legislation was deficient in this respect should consider, in accordance with their national legislative procedures, the question of supplementing their legislation with provisions conforming to the requirements of article 4 (a) and (b) of the Convention.

General Recommendation II (Fifth session, 1972)*

The Committee has considered some reports from States parties which expressed or implied the belief that the information mentioned in the Committee's communication of 28 January 1970 (CERD/C/R.12), need not be supplied by States parties on whose territories racial discrimination does not exist.

However, inasmuch as, in accordance with article 9, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, all States parties undertake to submit reports on the measures that they have adopted and that give effect to the provisions of the Convention and, since all the categories of information listed in the Committee's communication of 28 January 1970 refer to obligations undertaken by the States parties under the Convention, that communication is addressed to all States parties without distinction, whether or not racial discrimination exists in their respective territories. The Committee welcomes the inclusion in the reports from all States parties, which have not done so, of the necessary information in conformity with all the headings set out in the aforementioned communication of the Committee.

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* Contained in document A/8718.

General Recommendation III (Sixth session, 1972)*

The Committee has considered some reports from States parties containing information about measures taken to implement resolutions of United Nations organs concerning relations with the racist regimes in southern Africa.

The Committee notes that, in the tenth paragraph of the preamble to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, States parties have "resolved", inter alia, "to build an international community free from all forms of racial segregation and racial discrimination".

It notes also that, in article 3 of the Convention, "States parties particularly condemn racial segregation and apartheid".

Furthermore, the Committee notes that, in resolution 2784 (XXVI), section III, the General Assembly, immediately after taking note with appreciation of the Committee's second annual report and endorsing certain opinions and recommendations, submitted by it, proceeded to call upon "all the trading partners of South Africa to abstain from any action that constitutes an encouragement to the continued violation of the principles and objectives of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by South Africa and the illegal regime in Southern Rhodesia".

The Committee expresses the view that measures adopted on the national level to give effect to the provisions of the Convention are interrelated with measures taken on the international level to encourage respect everywhere for the principles of the Convention.

The Committee welcomes the inclusion in the reports submitted under article 9, paragraph 1, of the Convention, by any State Party which chooses to do so, of information regarding the status of its diplomatic, economic and other relations with the racist regimes in southern Africa.

General Recommendation IV (Eighth session, 1973)**

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Having considered reports submitted by States parties under article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination at its seventh and eighth sessions,

Bearing in mind the need for the reports sent by States parties to the Committee to be as informative as possible,

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* Contained in document A/8718.

** Contained in document A/9018.

Invites States parties to endeavour to include in their reports under article 9 relevant information on the demographic composition of the population referred to in the provisions of article 1 of the Convention.

General Recommendation V (Fifteenth session, 1977)*

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Bearing in mind the provisions of articles 7 and 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Convinced that combating prejudices which lead to racial discrimination, promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among racial and ethnic groups, and propagating the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and of the human rights declarations and other relevant instruments adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, are important and effective means of eliminating racial discrimination,

Considering that the obligations under article 7 of the Convention, which are binding on all States parties, must be fulfilled by them, including States which declare that racial discrimination is not practised on the territories under their jurisdiction, and that therefore all States parties are required to include information on their implementation of the provisions of that article in the reports they submit in accordance with article 9, paragraph 1, of the Convention,

Noting with regret that few States parties have included, in the reports they have submitted in accordance with article 9 of the Convention, information on the measures which they have adopted and which give effect to the provisions of article 7 of the Convention, and that that information has often been general and perfunctory,

Recalling that, in accordance with article 9, paragraph 1, of the Convention, the Committee may request further information from the States parties,

1. Requests every State party which has not already done so to include - in the next report it will submit in accordance with article 9 of the Convention, or in a special report before its next periodic report becomes due - adequate information on the measures which it has adopted and which give effect to the provisions of article 7 of the Convention;

2. Invites the attention of States parties to the fact that, in accordance with article 7 of the Convention, the information to which the preceding paragraph refers should include information on the "immediate and effective measures" which they have adopted, "in the fields of teaching, education, culture and information", with a view to:

(a) "combating prejudices which lead to racial discrimination";

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* Contained in document A/32/18.

(b) "Promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and racial or ethnical groups";

(c) "Propagating the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination" as well as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

General Recommendation VI (Twenty-fifth session, 1982)*

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Recognizing the fact that an impressive number of States has ratified, or acceded to, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Bearing in mind, however, that ratification alone does not enable the control system set up by the Convention to function effectively,

Recalling that article 9 of the Convention obliges States parties to submit initial and periodic reports on the measures that give effect to the provisions of the Convention,

Stating that at present no less than 89 reports are overdue from 62 States, that 42 of those reports are overdue from 15 States, each with two or more outstanding reports, and that four initial reports which were due between 1973 and 1978 have not been received,

Noting with regret that neither reminders sent through the Secretary-General to States parties nor the inclusion of the relevant information in the annual reports to the General Assembly has had the desired effect, in all cases,

Invites the General Assembly:

(a) to take note of the situation;

(b) to use its authority in order to ensure that the Committee could more effectively fulfil its obligations under the Convention.

General Recommendation VII relating to the implementation of article 4 of the Convention (Thirty-second session, 1985)**

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Having considered periodic reports of States parties for a period of 16 years, and in over 100 cases sixth, seventh and eighth periodic reports of States parties,

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* Contained in document A/37/18.

** Contained in document A/40/18.

Recalling and reaffirming its General Recommendation I of 24 February 1972 and its decision 3 (VII) of 4 May 1973,

Noting with satisfaction that in a number of reports States parties have provided information on specific cases dealing with the implementation of article 4 of the Convention with regard to acts of racial discrimination,

Noting, however, that in a number of States parties the necessary legislation to implement article 4 of the Convention has not been enacted, and that many States parties have not yet fulfilled all the requirements of article 4 (a) and (b) of the Convention,

Further recalling that, in accordance with the first paragraph of article 4, States parties "undertake to adopt immediate and positive measures designed to eradicate all incitement to, or acts of, such discrimination", with due regard to the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the rights expressly set forth in article 5 of the Convention,

Bearing in mind the preventive aspects of article 4 to deter racism and racial discrimination as well as activities aimed at their promotion or incitement,

1. Recommends that those States parties whose legislation does not satisfy the provisions of article 4 (a) and (b) of the Convention take the necessary steps with a view to satisfying the mandatory requirements of that article;

2. Requests that those States parties which have not yet done so inform the Committee more fully in their periodic reports of the manner and extent to which the provisions of article 4 (a) and (b) are effectively implemented and quote the relevant parts of the texts in their reports;

3. Further requests those States parties which have not yet done so to endeavour to provide in their periodic reports more information concerning decisions taken by the competent national tribunals and other State institutions regarding acts of racial discrimination and in particular those offences dealt with in article 4 (a) and (b).

General Recommendation VIII concerning the interpretation and application of article 1, paragraphs 1 and 4, of the Convention (Thirty-eighth session, 1990)*

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Having considered reports from States parties concerning information about the ways in which individuals are identified as being members of a particular racial or ethnic groups or groups,

Is of the opinion that such identification shall, if no justification exists to the contrary, be based upon self-identification by the individual concerned.

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* Contained in document A/45/18.

General Recommendation IX concerning the application of article 8, paragraph 1, of the Convention (Thirty-eighth session, 1990)*

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Considering that respect for the independence of the experts is essential to secure full observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Recalling article 8, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Alarmed by the tendency of the representatives of States, organizations and groups to put pressure upon experts, especially those serving as country rapporteurs,

Strongly recommends that they respect unreservedly the status of its members as independent experts of acknowledged impartiality serving in their personal capacity.

General Recommendation X concerning technical assistance (Thirty-ninth session, 1991)**

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Taking note of the recommendation of the third meeting of persons chairing the human rights treaty bodies, as endorsed by the General Assembly at its forty-fifth session, to the effect that a series of seminars or workshops should be organized at the national level for the purpose of training those involved in the preparation of State party reports,

Concerned over the continued failure of certain States parties to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination to meet their reporting obligations under the Convention,

Believing that training courses and workshops organized on the national level might prove of immeasurable assistance to officials responsible for the preparation of such State party reports,

1. Requests the Secretary-General to organize, in consultation with the States parties concerned, appropriate national training courses and workshops for their reporting officials as soon as practicable;

2. Recommends that the services of the staff of the Centre for Human Rights as well as of the experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination should be utilized, as appropriate, in the conduct of such training courses and workshops.

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* Contained in document A/45/18.

** Contained in document A/46/18.

General Recommendation XI on non-citizens (Forty-second session, 1993)*

1. Article 1, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination defines racial discrimination. Article 1, paragraph 2, excepts from this definition actions by a State party which differentiate between citizens and non-citizens. Article 1, paragraph 3, qualifies article 1, paragraph 2, by declaring that, among non-citizens, States parties may not discriminate against any particular nationality.

2. The Committee has noted that article 1, paragraph 2, has on occasion been interpreted as absolving States parties from any obligation to report on matters relating to legislation on foreigners. The Committee therefore affirms that States parties are under an obligation to report fully upon legislation on foreigners and its implementation.

3. The Committee further affirms that article 1, paragraph 2, must not be interpreted to detract in any way from the rights and freedoms recognized and enunciated in other instruments, especially the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

General Recommendation XII on successor States (Forty-second session, 1993)*

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Emphasizing the importance of universal participation of States in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Taking into account the emergence of successor States as a result of the dissolution of States,

1. *Encourages* successor States that have not yet done so to confirm to the Secretary-General, as depositary of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, that they continue to be bound by obligations under that Convention, if predecessor States were parties to it;

2. *Invites* successor States that have not yet done so to accede to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination if predecessor States were not parties to it;

3. *Invites* successor States to consider the importance of making the declaration under article 14, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, recognizing the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to receive and consider individual communications.

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* Contained in document A/48/18.

General Recommendation XIII on the training of law enforcement officials in the protection of human rights (Forty-second session, 1993)*

1. In accordance with article 2, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, States parties have undertaken that all public authorities and public institutions, national and local, will not engage in any practice of racial discrimination; further, States parties have undertaken to guarantee the rights listed in article 5 of the Convention to everyone without distinction as to race, colour or national or ethnic origin.

2. The fulfilment of these obligations very much depends upon national law enforcement officials who exercise police powers, especially the powers of detention or arrest, and upon whether they are properly informed about the obligations their State has entered into under the Convention. Law enforcement officials should receive intensive training to ensure that in the performance of their duties they respect as well as protect human dignity and maintain and uphold the human rights of all persons without distinction as to race, colour or national or ethnic origin.

3. In the implementation of article 7 of the Convention, the Committee calls upon States parties to review and improve the training of law enforcement officials so that the standards of the Convention as well as the Code of Conduct for Law Enforcement Officials (1979) are fully implemented. They should also include respective information thereupon in their periodic reports.

General Recommendation XIV on article 1, paragraph 1, of the Convention (Forty-second session, 1993)*

1. Non-discrimination, together with equality before the law and equal protection of the law without any discrimination, constitutes a basic principle in the protection of human rights. The Committee wishes to draw the attention of States parties to certain features of the definition of racial discrimination in article 1, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. It is of the opinion that the words "based on" do not bear any meaning different from "on the grounds of" in preambular paragraph 7. A distinction is contrary to the Convention if it has either the purpose or the effect of impairing particular rights and freedoms This is confirmed by the obligation placed upon States parties by article 2, paragraph 1 (c), to nullify any law or practice which has the effect of creating or perpetuating racial discrimination.

2. The Committee observes that a differentiation of treatment will not constitute discrimination if the criteria for such differentiation, judged against the objectives and purposes of the Convention, are legitimate or fall within the scope of article 1, paragraph 4, of the Convention. In considering the criteria that may have been employed, the Committee will acknowledge that

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* Contained in document A/48/18.

particular actions may have varied purposes. In seeking to determine whether an action has an effect contrary to the Convention, it will look to see whether that action has an unjustifiable disparate impact upon a group distinguished by race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin.

3. Article 1, paragraph 1, of the Convention also refers to the political, economic, social and cultural fields; the related rights and freedoms are set up in article 5.

General Recommendation XV on article 4 of the Convention (Forty-second session, 1993)*

1. When the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was being adopted, article 4 was regarded as central to the struggle against racial discrimination. At that time, there was a widespread fear of the revival of authoritarian ideologies. The proscription of the dissemination of ideas of racial superiority, and of organized activity likely to incite persons to racial violence, was properly regarded as crucial. Since that time, the Committee has received evidence of organized violence based on ethnic origin and the political exploitation of ethnic difference. As a result, implementation of article 4 is now of increased importance.

2. The Committee recalls its General Recommendation VII in which it explained that the provisions of article 4 are of a mandatory character. To satisfy these obligations, States parties have not only to enact appropriate legislation but also to ensure that it is effectively enforced. Because threats and acts of racial violence easily lead to other such acts and generate an atmosphere of hostility, only immediate intervention can meet the obligations of effective response.

3. Article 4 (a) requires States parties to penalize four categories of misconduct: (i) dissemination of ideas based upon racial superiority or hatred; (ii) incitement to racial hatred; (iii) acts of violence against any race or group of persons of another colour or ethnic origin; and (iv) incitement to such acts.

4. In the opinion of the Committee, the prohibition of the dissemination of all ideas based upon racial superiority or hatred is compatible with the right to freedom of opinion and expression. This right is embodied in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is recalled in article 5 (d) (viii) of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Its relevance to article 4 is noted in the article itself. The citizen's exercise of this right carries special duties and responsibilities, specified in article 29, paragraph 2, of the Universal Declaration, among which the obligation not to disseminate racist ideas is of particular importance. The Committee wishes, furthermore, to draw to the attention of States parties article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, according to which any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

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* Contained in document A/48/18.

5. Article 4 (a) also penalizes the financing of racist activities, which the Committee takes to include all the activities mentioned in paragraph 3 above, that is to say, activities deriving from ethnic as well as racial differences. The Committee calls upon States parties to investigate whether their national law and its implementation meet this requirement.

6. Some States have maintained that in their legal order it is inappropriate to declare illegal an organization before its members have promoted or incited racial discrimination. The Committee is of the opinion that article 4 (b) places a greater burden upon such States to be vigilant in proceeding against such organizations at the earliest moment. These organizations, as well as organized and other propaganda activities, have to be declared illegal and prohibited. Participation in these organizations is, of itself, to be punished.

7. Article 4 (c) of the Convention outlines the obligations of public authorities. Public authorities at all administrative levels, including municipalities, are bound by this paragraph. The Committee holds that States parties must ensure that they observe these obligations and report on this.

General Recommendation XVI concerning the application of article 9 of the Convention (Forty-second session, 1993)*

1. Under article 9 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, States parties have undertaken to submit, through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, for consideration by the Committee, reports on measures taken by them to give effect to the provisions of the Convention.

2. With respect to this obligation of the States parties, the Committee has noted that, on some occasions, reports have made references to situations existing in other States.

3. For this reason, the Committee wishes to remind States parties of the provisions of article 9 of the Convention concerning the content of their reports, while bearing in mind article 11, which is the only procedural means available to States for drawing to the attention of the Committee situations in which they consider that some other State is not giving effect to the provisions of the Convention.

General Recommendation XVII on the establishment of national institutions to facilitate the implementation of the Convention (Forty-second session, 1993)*

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Considering the practice of States parties concerning the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

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* Contained in document A/48/18.

Convinced of the necessity to encourage further the establishment of national institutions to facilitate the implementation of the Convention,

Emphasizing the need to strengthen further the implementation of the Convention,

1. Recommends that States parties establish national commissions or other appropriate bodies, taking into account, mutatis mutandis, the principles relating to the status of national institutions annexed to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1992/54 of 3 March 1992, to serve, inter alia, the following purposes:

(a) To promote respect for the enjoyment of human rights without any discrimination, as expressly set out in article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;

(b) To review government policy towards protection against racial discrimination;

(c) To monitor legislative compliance with the provisions of the Convention;

(d) To educate the public about the obligations of States parties under the Convention;

(e) To assist the Government in the preparation of reports submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination;

2. Also recommends that, where such commissions have been established, they should be associated with the preparation of reports and possibly included in government delegations in order to intensify the dialogue between the Committee and the State party concerned.

General recommendation XVIII on the establishment of an international tribunal to prosecute crimes against humanity (Forty-fourth session, 1994)*

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination,

Alarmed at the increasing number of racially and ethnically motivated massacres and atrocities occurring in different regions of the world,

Convinced that the impunity of the perpetrators is a major factor contributing to the occurrence and recurrence of these crimes,

Convinced of the need to establish, as quickly as possible, an international tribunal with general jurisdiction to prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977 thereto,

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* Contained in document A/49/18.

Taking into account the work already done on this question by the International Law Commission and the encouragement given in this regard by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/31 of 9 December 1993,

Also taking into account Security Council resolution 872 (1993) of 25 May 1993 establishing an international tribunal for the purpose of prosecuting persons responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia,

1. Considers that an international tribunal with general jurisdiction should be established urgently to prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity, including murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, imprisonment, torture, rape persecutions on political, racial and religious grounds and other inhumane acts directed against any civilian population, and grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the Additional Protocols of 1977 thereto;

2. Urges the Secretary-General to bring the present recommendation to the attention of the competent organs and bodies of the United Nations, including the Security Council;

3. Requests the High Commissioner for Human Rights to ensure that all relevant information pertaining to the crimes referred to in paragraph 1 is systematically collected by the Centre for Human Rights so that it can be readily available to the international tribunal as soon as it is established.

General recommendation XIX on article 3 of the Convention (Forty-seventh session, 1995)*

1. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination calls the attention of States parties to the wording of article 3, by which States parties undertake to prevent, prohibit and eradicate all practices of racial segregation and apartheid in territories under their jurisdiction. The reference to apartheid may have been directed exclusively to South Africa, but the article as adopted prohibits all forms of racial segregation in all countries.

2. The Committee believes that the obligation to eradicate all practices of this nature includes the obligation to eradicate the consequences of such practices undertaken or tolerated by previous Governments in the State or imposed by forces outside the State.

3. The Committee observes that while conditions of complete or partial racial segregation may in some countries have been created by governmental policies, a condition of partial segregation may also arise as an unintended by-product of the actions of private persons. In many cities residential patterns are influenced by group differences in income, which are sometimes

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* Contained in document A/50/18.

combined with differences of race, colour, descent and national or ethnic origin, so that inhabitants can be stigmatized and individuals suffer a form of discrimination in which racial grounds are mixed with other grounds.

4. The Committee therefore affirms that a condition of racial segregation can also arise without any initiative or direct involvement by the public authorities. It invites States parties to monitor all trends which can give rise to racial segregation, to work for the eradication of any negative consequences that ensue, and to describe any such action in their periodic reports.

IV

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

According to article 21, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee may make suggestions and general recommendations based on the examination of the reports and information received from the States parties. Such suggestions and general recommendations shall be included in the report of the Committee together with comments, if any, from States parties. The Committee has so far adopted a total of 20 general recommendations.

General Recommendation No. 1 (Fifth session, 1986)*

> "Initial reports submitted under article 18 of the Convention should cover the situation up to the date of submission. Thereafter, reports should be submitted at least every four years after the first report was due and should include obstacles encountered in implementing the Convention fully and the measures adopted to overcome such obstacles."*

General Recommendation No. 2 (Sixth session, 1987)**

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Bearing in mind that the Committee had been faced with difficulties in its work because some initial reports of States parties under article 18 of the Convention did not reflect adequately the information available in the State party concerned in accordance with the guidelines,

Recommends:

(a) That the States parties, in preparing reports under article 18 of the Convention, should follow the general guidelines adopted in August 1983 (CEDAW/C/7) as to the form, content and date of reports;

(b) That the States parties should follow the general recommendation adopted in 1986 in these terms:

> "Initial reports submitted under article 18 of the Convention should cover the situation up to the date of submission. Thereafter, reports should be submitted at least every four years after the first report was due and should include obstacles encountered in implementing the Convention fully and the measures adopted to overcome such obstacles."

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* Contained in document A/41/45.

** Contained in document A/42/38.

(c) That additional information supplementing the report of a State party should be sent to the Secretariat at least three months before the session at which the report is due to be considered.

General Recommendation No. 3 (Sixth session, 1987)*

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Considering that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women has considered 34 reports from States parties since 1983,

Further considering that, although the reports have come from States with different levels of development, they present features in varying degrees showing the existence of stereotyped conceptions of women, owing to socio-cultural factors, that perpetuate discrimination based on sex and hinder the implementation of article 5 of the Convention,

Urges all States parties effectively to adopt education and public information programmes, which will help eliminate prejudices and current practices that hinder the full operation of the principle of the social equality of women.

General Recommendation No. 4 (Sixth session, 1987)*

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Having examined reports from States parties at its sessions,

Expressed concern in relation to the significant number of reservations that appeared to be incompatible with the object and purpose of the Convention,

Welcomes the decision of the States parties to consider reservations at its next meeting in New York in 1988, and to that end suggests that all States parties concerned reconsider such reservations with a view to withdrawing them.

General Recommendation No. 5 (Seventh session, 1988)**

Temporary special measures

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Taking note that the reports, the introductory remarks and the replies by States parties reveal that while significant progress has been achieved in regard to repealing or modifying discriminatory laws, there is still a need for action to be taken to implement fully the Convention by introducing measures to promote de facto equality between men and women,

Recalling article 4.1 of the Convention,

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* Contained in document A/42/38.

** Contained in document A/43/38.

Recommends that States parties make more use of temporary special measures such as positive action, preferential treatment or quota systems to advance women's integration into education, the economy, politics and employment.

General Recommendation No. 6 (Seventh session, 1988)*

Effective national machinery and publicity

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Having considered the reports of States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Noting United Nations General Assembly resolution 42/60 of 30 November 1987,

Recommends that States parties:

1. Establish and/or strengthen effective national machinery, institutions and procedures, at a high level of Government, and with adequate resources, commitment and authority to:

(a) Advise on the impact on women of all government policies;

(b) Monitor the situation of women comprehensively;

(c) Help formulate new policies and effectively carry out strategies and measures to eliminate discrimination;

2. Take appropriate steps to ensure the dissemination of the Convention, the reports of the States parties under article 18 and the reports of the Committee in the language of the States concerned;

3. Seek the assistance of the Secretary-General and the Department of Public Information in providing translations of the Convention and the reports of the Committee;

4. Include in their initial and periodic reports the action taken in respect of this recommendation.

General Recommendation No. 7 (Seventh session, 1988)*

Resources

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Noting General Assembly resolutions 40/39, 41/108 and in particular 42/60, paragraph 14, which invited the Committee and the States parties to consider the question of holding future sessions of the Committee at Vienna,

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* Contained in document A/43/38.

Bearing in mind General Assembly resolution 42/105 and, in particular, paragraph 11, which requests the Secretary-General to strengthen coordination between the United Nations Centre for Human Rights and the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the secretariat in relation to the implementation of human rights treaties and servicing treaty bodies,

Recommends to the States parties:

1. That they continue to support proposals for strengthening the coordination between the Centre for Human Rights at Geneva and the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs at Vienna, in relation to the servicing of the Committee;

2. That they support proposals that the Committee meet in New York and Vienna;

3. That they take all necessary and appropriate steps to ensure that adequate resources and services are available to the Committee to assist it in its functions under the Convention and in particular that full-time staff are available to help the Committee to prepare for its sessions and during its session;

4. That they ensure that supplementary reports and materials are submitted to the Secretariat in due time to be translated into the official languages of the United Nations in time for distribution and consideration by the Committee.

General Recommendation No. 8 (Seventh session, 1988)*

Implementation of article 8 of the Convention

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Having considered the reports of States parties submitted in accordance with article 18 of the Convention,

Recommends that States parties take further direct measures in accordance with article 4 of the Convention to ensure the full implementation of article 8 of the Convention and to ensure to women on equal terms with men and without any discrimination the opportunities to represent their Government at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

General Recommendation No. 9 (Eighth session, 1989)**

Statistical data concerning the situation of women

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Considering that statistical information is absolutely necessary in order to understand the real situation of women in each of the States parties to the Convention,

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* Contained in document A/43/38.

** Contained in document A/44/38.

Having observed that many of the States parties that present their reports for consideration by the Committee do not provide statistics,

Recommends that States parties should make every effort to ensure that their national statistical services responsible for planning national censuses and other social and economic surveys formulate their questionnaires in such a way that data can be disaggregated according to gender, with regard to both absolute numbers and percentages, so that interested users can easily obtain information on the situation of women in the particular sector in which they are interested.

General Recommendation No. 10 (Eighth session, 1989)*

Tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Considering that 18 December 1989 marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Considering further that in those 10 years the Convention has proved to be one of the most effective instruments that the United Nations has adopted to promote equality between the sexes in the societies of its States Members,

Recalling general recommendation No. 6 (seventh session 1988) on effective national machinery and publicity,

Recommends that, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention, the States parties should consider:

1. Undertaking programmes including conferences and seminars to publicize the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the main languages of and providing information on the Convention in their respective countries;

2. Inviting their national women's organizations to cooperate in the publicity campaigns regarding the Convention and its implementation and encouraging non-governmental organizations at the national, regional and international levels to publicize the Convention and its implementation;

3. Encouraging action to ensure the full implementation of the principles of the Convention, and in particular article 8, which relates to the participation of women at all levels of activity of the United Nations and the United Nations system;

4. Requesting the Secretary-General to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention by publishing and disseminating, in cooperation with the specialized agencies, printed and other materials

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* Contained in document A/44/38.

regarding the Convention and its implementation in all official languages of the United Nations, preparing television documentaries about the Convention, and making the necessary resources available to the Division for the Advancement of Women, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Office at Vienna, to prepare an analysis of the information provided by States parties in order to update and publish the report of the Committee (A/CONF.116/13), which was first published for the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held at Nairobi in 1985.

General Recommendation No. 11 (Eighth session, 1989)

Technical advisory services for reporting obligations

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Bearing in mind that, as at 3 March 1989, 96 States had ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Taking into account the fact that by that date 60 initial and 19 second periodic reports had been received,

Noting that 36 initial and 36 second periodic reports were due by 3 March 1989 and had not yet been received,

Welcoming the request in General Assembly resolution 43/115, paragraph 9, that the Secretary-General should arrange, within existing resources and taking into account the priorities of the programme of advisory services, further training courses for those countries experiencing the most serious difficulties in meeting their reporting obligations under international instruments on human rights,

Recommends to States parties that they should encourage, support and cooperate in projects for technical advisory services, including training seminars, to assist States parties on their request in fulfilling their reporting obligations under article 18 of the Convention.

General Recommendation No. 12 (Eighth session, 1989)

Violence against women

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Considering that articles 2, 5, 11, 12 and 16 of the Convention require the States parties to act to protect women against violence of any kind occurring within the family, at the workplace or in any other area of social life,

Taking into account Economic and Social Council resolution 1988/27,

Recommends to the States parties that they should include in their periodic reports to the Committee information about:

1. The legislation in force to protect women against the incidence of all kinds of violence in everyday life (including sexual violence, abuses in the family, sexual harassment at the workplace, etc.);

2. Other measures adopted to eradicate this violence;

3. The existence of support services for women who are the victims of aggression or abuses;

4. Statistical data on the incidence of violence of all kinds against women and on women who are the victims of violence.

General Recommendation No. 13 (Eighth session, 1989)*

Equal remuneration for work of equal value

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Recalling International Labour Organisation Convention No. 100 concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value, which has been ratified by a large majority of States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Recalling also that it has considered 51 initial and 5 second periodic reports of States parties since 1983,

Considering that although reports of States parties indicate that, even though the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value has been accepted in the legislation of many countries, more remains to be done to ensure the application of that principle in practice, in order to overcome the gender-segregation in the labour market,

Recommends to the States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women that:

1. In order to implement fully the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, those States parties that have not yet ratified ILO Convention No. 100 should be encouraged to do so;

2. They should consider the study, development and adoption of job evaluation systems based on gender-neutral criteria that would facilitate the comparison of the value of those jobs of a different nature, in which women presently predominate, with those jobs in which men presently predominate, and they should include the results achieved in their reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women;

3. They should support, as far as practicable, the creation of implementation machinery and encourage the efforts of the parties to collective agreements, where they apply, to ensure the application of the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value.

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* Contained in document A/44/38.

General Recommendation No. 14 (Ninth session, 1990)*

Female circumcision

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Concerned about the continuation of the practice of female circumcision and other traditional practices harmful to the health of women,

Noting with satisfaction that Governments, where such practices exist, national women's organizations, non-governmental organizations, specialized agencies, such as the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund, as well as the Commission on Human Rights and its Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, remain seized of the issue having particularly recognized that such traditional practices as female circumcision have serious health and other consequences for women and children,

Noting with interest the study of the Special Rapporteur on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, as well as the study of the Special Working Group on Traditional Practices,

Recognizing that women are taking important action themselves to identify and to combat practices that are prejudicial to the health and well-being of women and children,

Convinced that the important action that is being taken by women and by all interested groups needs to be supported and encouraged by Governments,

Noting with grave concern that there are continuing cultural, traditional and economic pressures which help to perpetuate harmful practices, such as female circumcision,

Recommends to States parties:

(a) That States parties take appropriate and effective measures with a view to eradicating the practice of female circumcision. Such measures could include:

- (i) The collection and dissemination by universities, medical or nursing associations, national women's organizations or other bodies of basic data about such traditional practices;
- (ii) The support of women's organizations at the national and local levels working for the elimination of female circumcision and other practices harmful to women;
- (iii) The encouragement of politicians, professionals, religious and community leaders at all levels including the media and the arts to cooperate in influencing attitudes towards the eradication of female circumcision;

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* Contained in document A/45/38 and Corrigendum.

(iv) The introduction of appropriate educational and training programmes and seminars based on research findings about the problems arising from female circumcision;

(b) That States parties include in their national health policies appropriate strategies aimed at eradicating female circumcision in public health care. Such strategies could include the special responsibility of health personnel including traditional birth attendants to explain the harmful effects of female circumcision;

(c) That States parties invite assistance, information and advice from the appropriate organizations of the United Nations system to support and assist efforts being deployed to eliminate harmful traditional practices;

(d) That States parties include in their reports to the Committee under articles 10 and 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women information about measures taken to eliminate female circumcision.

General Recommendation No. 15 (Ninth session, 1990)*

Avoidance of discrimination against women in national strategies for the prevention and control of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Having considered information brought to its attention on the potential effects of both the global pandemic of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and strategies to control it on the exercise of the rights of women,

Having regard to the reports and materials prepared by the World Health Organization and other United Nations organizations, organs and bodies in relation to human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and, in particular, the note by the Secretary-General to the Commission on the Status of Women on the effects of AIDS on the advancement of women and the Final Document of the International Consultation on AIDS and Human Rights, held at Geneva from 26 to 28 July 1989,

Noting World Health Assembly resolution WHA 41.24 on the avoidance of discrimination in relation to HIV-infected people and people with AIDS of 13 May 1988, resolution 1989/11 of the Commission on Human Rights on non-discrimination in the field of health, of 2 March 1989, and in particular the Paris Declaration on Women, Children and AIDS, of 30 November 1989,

Noting that the World Health Organization has announced that the theme of World Aids Day, 1 December 1990, will be "Women and Aids",

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* Contained in document A/45/38.

Recommends:

(a) That States parties intensify efforts in disseminating information to increase public awareness of the risk of HIV infection and AIDS, especially in women and children, and of its effects on them;

(b) That programmes to combat AIDS should give special attention to the rights and needs of women and children, and to the factors relating to the reproductive role of women and their subordinate position in some societies which make them especially vulnerable to HIV infection;

(c) That States parties ensure the active participation of women in primary health care and take measures to enhance their role as care providers, health workers and educators in the prevention of infection with HIV;

(d) That all States parties include in their reports under article 12 of the Convention information on the effects of AIDS on the situation of women and on the action taken to cater to the needs of those women who are infected and to prevent specific discrimination against women in response to AIDS.

General Recommendation No. 16 (Tenth session, 1991)

Unpaid women workers in rural and urban family enterprises*

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Bearing in mind articles 2 (c) and 11 (c), (d) and (e) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and general recommendation No. 9 (eighth session, 1989) on statistical data concerning the situation of women,

Taking into consideration that a high percentage of women in the States parties work without payment, social security and social benefits in enterprises owned usually by a male member of the family,

Noting that the reports presented to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women generally do not refer to the problem of unpaid women workers of family enterprises,

Affirming that unpaid work constitutes a form of women's exploitation that is contrary to the Convention,

Recommends that States parties:

(a) Include in their reports to the Committee information on the legal and social situation of unpaid women working in family enterprises;

(b) Collect statistical data on women who work without payment, social security and social benefits in enterprises owned by a family member, and include these data in their report to the Committee;

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* Contained in document A/46/38.

(c) Take the necessary steps to guarantee payment, social security and social benefits for women who work without such benefits in enterprises owned by a family member.

General Recommendation No. 17 (Tenth session, 1991)

Measurement and quantification of the unremunerated domestic activities of women and their recognition in the gross national product*

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Bearing in mind article 11 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Recalling paragraph 120 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women,

Affirming that the measurement and quantification of the unremunerated domestic activities of women, which contribute to development in each country, will help to reveal the de facto economic role of women,

Convinced that such measurement and quantification offers a basis for the formulation of further policies related to the advancement of women,

Noting the discussions of the Statistical Commission, at its twenty-first session, on the current revision of the System of National Accounts and the development of statistics on women,

Recommends that States parties:

(a) Encourage and support research and experimental studies to measure and value the unremunerated domestic activities of women; for example, by conducting time-use surveys as part of their national household survey programmes and by collecting statistics disaggregated by gender on time spent on activities both in the household and on the labour market;

(b) Take steps, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, to quantify and include the unremunerated domestic activities of women in the gross national product;

(c) Include in their reports submitted under article 18 of the Convention information on the research and experimental studies undertaken to measure and value unremunerated domestic activities, as well as on the progress made in the incorporation of the unremunerated domestic activities of women in national accounts.

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* Contained in document A/46/38.

General Recommendation No. 18 (Tenth session, 1991)

Disabled women*

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Taking into consideration particularly article 3 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,

Having considered more than 60 periodic reports of States parties, and having recognized that they provide scarce information on disabled women,

Concerned about the situation of disabled women, who suffer from a double discrimination linked to their special living conditions,

Recalling paragraph 296 of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, in which disabled women are considered as a vulnerable group under the heading "areas of special concern",

Affirming its support for the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (1982),

Recommends that States parties provide information on disabled women in their periodic reports, and on measures taken to deal with their particular situation, including special measures to ensure that they have equal access to education and employment, health services and social security, and to ensure that they can participate in all areas of social and cultural life.

General Recommendation No. 19 (Eleventh session, 1992): Violence against women**

Background

1. Gender-based violence is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men.

2. In 1989, the Committee recommended that States should include in their reports information on violence and on measures introduced to deal with it (General recommendation 12, eighth session).

3. At its tenth session in 1991, it was decided to allocate part of the eleventh session to a discussion and study on article 6 and other articles of the Convention relating to violence towards women and the sexual harassment and exploitation of women. That subject was chosen in anticipation of the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights, convened by the General Assembly by its resolution 45/155 of 18 December 1990.

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* Contained in document A/46/38.

** Contained in document A/47/38.

4. The Committee concluded that not all the reports of States parties adequately reflected the close connection between discrimination against women, gender-based violence, and violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The full implementation of the Convention required States to take positive measures to eliminate all forms of violence against women.

5. The Committee suggested to States parties that in reviewing their laws and policies, and in reporting under the Convention, they should have regard to the following comments of the Committee concerning gender-based violence.

General comments

6. The Convention in article 1 defines discrimination against women. The definition of discrimination includes gender-based violence, that is, violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. Gender-based violence may breach specific provisions of the Convention, regardless of whether those provisions expressly mention violence.

7. Gender-based violence, which impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms under general international law or under human rights conventions, is discrimination within the meaning of article 1 of the Convention. These rights and freedoms include:

(a) The right to life;

(b) The right not to be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment;

(c) The right to equal protection according to humanitarian norms in time of international or internal armed conflict;

(d) The right to liberty and security of person;

(e) The right to equal protection under the law;

(f) The right to equality in the family;

(g) The right to the highest standard attainable of physical and mental health;

(h) The right to just and favourable conditions of work.

8. The Convention applies to violence perpetrated by public authorities. Such acts of violence may breach that State's obligations under general international human rights law and under other conventions, in addition to breaching this Convention.

9. It is emphasized, however, that discrimination under the Convention is not restricted to action by or on behalf of Governments (see articles 2 (e), 2 (f) and 5). For example, under article 2 (e) the Convention calls on States parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against

women by any person, organization or enterprise. Under general international law and specific human rights covenants, States may also be responsible for private acts if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent violations of rights or to investigate and punish acts of violence, and for providing compensation.

Comments on specific articles of the Convention

Articles 2 and 3

10. Articles 2 and 3 establish a comprehensive obligation to eliminate discrimination in all its forms in addition to the specific obligations under articles 5-16.

Articles 2 (f), 5 and 10 (c)

11. Traditional attitudes by which women are regarded as subordinate to men or as having stereotyped roles perpetuate widespread practices involving violence or coercion, such as family violence and abuse, forced marriage, dowry deaths, acid attacks and female circumcision. Such prejudices and practices may justify gender-based violence as a form of protection or control of women. The effect of such violence on the physical and mental integrity of women is to deprive them of the equal enjoyment, exercise and knowledge of human rights and fundamental freedoms. While this comment addresses mainly actual or threatened violence the underlying consequences of these forms of gender-based violence help to maintain women in subordinate roles and contribute to their low level of political participation and to their lower level of education, skills and work opportunities.

12. These attitudes also contribute to the propagation of pornography and the depiction and other commercial exploitation of women as sexual objects, rather than as individuals. This in turn contributes to gender-based violence.

Article 6

13. States parties are required by article 6 to take measures to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of the prostitution of women.

14. Poverty and unemployment increase opportunities for trafficking in women. In addition to established forms of trafficking there are new forms of sexual exploitation, such as sex tourism, the recruitment of domestic labour from developing countries to work in developed countries, and organized marriages between women from developing countries and foreign nationals. These practices are incompatible with the equal enjoyment of rights by women and with respect for their rights and dignity. They put women at special risk of violence and abuse.

15. Poverty and unemployment force many women, including young girls, into prostitution. Prostitutes are especially vulnerable to violence because their status, which may be unlawful, tends to marginalize them. They need the equal protection of laws against rape and other forms of violence.

16. Wars, armed conflicts and the occupation of territories often lead to increased prostitution, trafficking in women and sexual assault of women, which require specific protective and punitive measures.

Article 11

17. Equality in employment can be seriously impaired when women are subjected to gender-specific violence, such as sexual harassment in the workplace.

18. Sexual harassment includes such unwelcome sexually determined behaviour as physical contact and advances, sexually coloured remarks, showing pornography and sexual demands, whether by words or actions. Such conduct can be humiliating and may constitute a health and safety problem; it is discriminatory when the woman has reasonable ground to believe that her objection would disadvantage her in connection with her employment, including recruitment or promotion, or when it creates a hostile working environment.

Article 12

19. States parties are required by article 12 to take measures to ensure equal access to health care. Violence against women puts their health and lives at risk.

20. In some States there are traditional practices perpetuated by culture and tradition that are harmful to the health of women and children. These practices include dietary restrictions for pregnant women, preference for male children and female circumcision or genital mutilation.

Article 14

21. Rural women are at risk of gender-based violence because traditional attitudes regarding the subordinate role of women that persist in many rural communities. Girls from rural communities are at special risk of violence and sexual exploitation when they leave the rural community to seek employment in towns.

Article 16 (and article 5)

22. Compulsory sterilization or abortion adversely affects women's physical and mental health, and infringes the right of women to decide on the number and spacing of their children.

23. Family violence is one of the most insidious forms of violence against women. It is prevalent in all societies. Within family relationships women of all ages are subjected to violence of all kinds, including battering, rape, other forms of sexual assault, mental and other forms of violence, which are perpetuated by traditional attitudes. Lack of economic independence forces many women to stay in violent relationships. The abrogation of their family responsibilities by men can be a form of violence, and coercion. These forms of violence put women's health at risk and impair their ability to participate in family life and public life on a basis of equality.

Specific recommendations

24. In light of these comments, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women recommends:

(a) States parties should take appropriate and effective measures to overcome all forms of gender-based violence, whether by public or private act;

(b) States parties should ensure that laws against family violence and abuse, rape, sexual assault and other gender-based violence give adequate protection to all women, and respect their integrity and dignity. Appropriate protective and support services should be provided for victims. Gender-sensitive training of judicial and law enforcement officers and other public officials is essential for the effective implementation of the Convention;

(c) States parties should encourage the compilation of statistics and research on the extent, causes and effects of violence, and on the effectiveness of measures to prevent and deal with violence;

(d) Effective measures should be taken to ensure that the media respect and promote respect for women;

(e) States parties in their report should identify the nature and extent of attitudes, customs and practices that perpetuate violence against women, and the kinds of violence that result. They should report the measures that they have undertaken to overcome violence, and the effect of those measures;

(f) Effective measures should be taken to overcome these attitudes and practices. States should introduce education and public information programmes to help eliminate prejudices which hinder women's equality (recommendation No. 3, 1987);

(g) Specific preventive and punitive measures are necessary to overcome trafficking and sexual exploitation;

(h) States parties in their reports should describe the extent of all these problems and the measures, including penal provisions, preventive and rehabilitation measures, that have been taken to protect women engaged in prostitution or subject to trafficking and other forms of sexual exploitation. The effectiveness of these measures should also be described;

(i) Effective complaints procedures and remedies, including compensation, should be provided;

(j) States parties should include in their reports information on sexual harassment, and on measures to protect women from sexual harassment and other forms of violence of coercion in the workplace;

(k) States parties should establish or support services for victims of family violence, rape, sex assault and other forms of gender-based violence, including refuges, specially trained health workers, rehabilitation and counselling;

(l) States parties should take measures to overcome such practices and should take account of the Committee's recommendation on female circumcision (recommendation No. 14) in reporting on health issues;

(m) States parties should ensure that measures are taken to prevent coercion in regard to fertility and reproduction, and to ensure that women are not forced to seek unsafe medical procedures such as illegal abortion because of lack of appropriate services in regard to fertility control;

(n) States parties in their reports should state the extent of these problems and should indicate the measures that have been taken and their effect;

(o) States parties should ensure that services for victims of violence are accessible to rural women and that where necessary special services are provided to isolated communities;

(p) Measures to protect them from violence should include training and employment opportunities and the monitoring of the employment conditions of domestic workers;

(q) States parties should report on the risks to rural women, the extent and nature of violence and abuse to which they are subject, their need for and access to support and other services and the effectiveness of measures to overcome violence;

(r) Measures that are necessary to overcome family violence should include:

(i) Criminal penalties where necessary and civil remedies in case of domestic violence;

(ii) Legislation to remove the defence of honour in regard to the assault or murder of a female family member;

(iii) Services to ensure the safety and security of victims of family violence, including refuges, counselling and rehabilitation programmes;

(iv) Rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators of domestic violence;

(v) Support services for families where incest or sexual abuse has occurred;

(s) States parties should report on the extent of domestic violence and sexual abuse, and on the preventive, punitive and remedial measures that have been taken;

(t) That States parties should take all legal and other measures that are necessary to provide effective protection of women against gender-based violence, including, inter alia:

(i) Effective legal measures, including penal sanctions, civil remedies and compensatory provisions to protect women against all kinds of violence, including, inter alia, violence and abuse in the family, sexual assault and sexual harassment in the workplace;

(ii) Preventive measures, including public information and education programmes to change attitudes concerning the roles and status of men and women;

(iii) Protective measures, including refuges, counselling, rehabilitation and support services for women who are the victims of violence or who are at risk of violence;

(u) That States parties should report on all forms of gender-based violence, and that such reports should include all available data on the incidence of each form of violence, and on the effects of such violence on the women who are victims;

(v) That the reports of States parties should include information on the legal, preventive and protective measures that have been taken to overcome violence against women, and on the effectiveness of such measures.

General recommendation No. 20 (Eleventh session, 1992): Reservations to the Convention*

1. The Committee recalled the decision of the Fourth Meeting of States parties on reservations to the Convention with regard to article 28.2, which was welcomed in General recommendation No. 4 of the Committee.

2. The Committee recommended that, in connection with preparations for the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, States parties should:

(a) Raise the question of the validity and the legal effect of reservations to the Convention in the context of reservations to other human rights treaties;

(b) Reconsider such reservations with a view to strengthening the implementation of all human rights treaties;

(c) Consider introducing a procedure on reservations to the Convention comparable with that of other human rights treaties.

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* Contained in document A/47/38.

General recommendation 21 (thirteenth session): Equality in marriage and family relations

1. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex) affirms the equality of human rights for women and men in society and in the family. The Convention has an important place among international treaties concerned with human rights.

2. Other conventions and declarations also confer great significance on the family and woman's status within it. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (General Assembly resolution 217/A (III), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex), the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women (resolution 1040 (XI), annex), the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages (resolution 1763 A (XVII), annex) and the subsequent Recommendation thereon (resolution 2018 (XX)) and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women.

3. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women recalls the inalienable rights of women which are already embodied in the above-mentioned conventions and declarations, but it goes further by recognizing the importance of culture and tradition in shaping the thinking and behaviour of men and women and the significant part they play in restricting the exercise of basic rights by women.

Background

4. The year 1994 has been designated by the General Assembly in its resolution 44/82 as the International Year of the Family. The Committee wishes to take the opportunity to stress the significance of compliance with women's basic rights within the family as one of the measures which will support and encourage the national celebrations that will take place.

5. Having chosen in this way to mark the International Year of the Family, the Committee wishes to analyse three articles in the Convention that have special significance for the status of women in the family:

Article 9

> 1. States parties shall grant women equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their nationality. They shall ensure in particular that neither marriage to an alien nor change of nationality by the husband during marriage shall automatically change the nationality of the wife, render her stateless or force upon her the nationality of the husband.
>
> 2. States parties shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.

Comment

6. Nationality is critical to full participation in society. In general, States confer nationality on those who are born in that country. Nationality can also be acquired by reason of settlement or granted for humanitarian reasons such as statelessness. Without status as nationals or citizens, women are deprived of the right to vote or to stand for public office and may be denied access to public benefits and a choice of residence. Nationality should be capable of change by an adult woman and should not be arbitrarily removed because of marriage or dissolution of marriage or because her husband or father changes his nationality.

Article 15

> 1. States parties shall accord to women equality with men before the law.
>
> 2. States parties shall accord to women, in civil matters, a legal capacity identical to that of men and the same opportunities to exercise that capacity. In particular, they shall give women equal rights to conclude contracts and to administer property and shall treat them equally in all stages of procedure in courts and tribunals.
>
> 3. States parties agree that all contracts and all other private instruments of any kind with a legal effect which is directed at restricting the legal capacity of women shall be deemed null and void.
>
> 4. States parties shall accord to men and women the same rights with regard to the law relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile.

Comment

7. When a woman cannot enter into a contract at all, or have access to financial credit, or can do so only with her husband's or a male relative's concurrence or guarantee, she is denied legal autonomy. Any such restriction prevents her from holding property as the sole owner and precludes her from the legal management of her own business or from entering into any other form of contract. Such restrictions seriously limit the woman's ability to provide for herself and her dependants.

8. A woman's right to bring litigation is limited in some countries by law or by her access to legal advice and her ability to seek redress from the courts. In others, her status as a witness or her evidence is accorded less respect or weight than that of a man. Such laws or customs limit the woman's right effectively to pursue or retain her equal share of property and diminish her standing as an independent, responsible and valued member of her community. When countries limit a woman's legal capacity by their laws, or permit individuals or institutions to do the same, they are denying women their rights to be equal with men and restricting women's ability to provide for themselves and their dependants.

9. Domicile is a concept in common law countries referring to the country in which a person intends to reside and to whose jurisdiction she will submit. Domicile is originally acquired by a child through its parents but, in adulthood, denotes the country in which a person normally resides and in which she intends to reside permanently. As in the case of nationality, the examination of States parties' reports demonstrates that a woman will not always be permitted at law to choose her own domicile. Domicile, like nationality, should be capable of change at will by an adult woman regardless of her marital status. Any restrictions on a woman's right to choose a domicile on the same basis as a man may limit her access to the courts in the country in which she lives or prevent her from entering and leaving a country freely and in her own right.

10. Migrant women who live and work temporarily in another country should be permitted the same rights as men to have their spouses, partners and children join them.

Article 16

> 1. States parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations and in particular shall ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:
>
> (a) The same right to enter into marriage;
>
> (b) The same right freely to choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent;
>
> (c) The same rights and responsibilities during marriage and at its dissolution;
>
> (d) The same rights and responsibilities as parents, irrespective of their marital status, in matters relating to their children; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
>
> (e) The same rights to decide freely and responsibly on the number and spacing of their children and to have access to the information, education and means to enable them to exercise these rights;
>
> (f) The same rights and responsibilities with regard to guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children, or similar institutions where these concepts exist in national legislation; in all cases the interests of the children shall be paramount;
>
> (g) The same personal rights as husband and wife, including the right to choose a family name, a profession and an occupation;
>
> (h) The same rights for both spouses in respect of the ownership, acquisition, management, administration, enjoyment and disposition of property, whether free of charge or for a valuable consideration.

> 2. The betrothal and the marriage of a child shall have no legal effect, and all necessary action, including legislation, shall be taken to specify a minimum age for marriage and to make the registration of marriages in an official registry compulsory.

Comment

Public and private life

11. Historically, human activity in public and private life has been viewed differently and regulated accordingly. In all societies women who have traditionally performed their roles in the private or domestic sphere have long had those activities treated as inferior.

12. As such activities are invaluable for the survival of society, there can be no justification for applying different and discriminatory laws or customs to them. Reports of States parties disclose that there are still countries where *de jure* equality does not exist. Women are thereby prevented from having equal access to resources and from enjoying equality of status in the family and society. Even where *de jure* equality exists, all societies assign different roles, which are regarded as inferior, to women. In this way, principles of justice and equality contained in particular in article 16 and also in articles 2, 5 and 24 of the Convention are being violated.

Various forms of family

13. The form and concept of the family can vary from State to State, and even between regions within a State. Whatever form it takes, and whatever the legal system, religion, custom or tradition within the country, the treatment of women in the family both at law and in private must accord with the principles of equality and justice for all people, as article 2 of the Convention requires.

Polygamous marriages

14. States parties' reports also disclose that polygamy is practised in a number of countries. Polygamous marriage contravenes a woman's right to equality with men, and can have such serious emotional and financial consequences for her and her dependants that such marriages ought to be discouraged and prohibited. The Committee notes with concern that some States parties, whose constitutions guarantee equal rights, permit polygamous marriage in accordance with personal or customary law. This violates the constitutional rights of women, and breaches the provisions of article 5 (a) of the Convention.

Article 16 (1) (a) and (b)

15. While most countries report that national constitutions and laws comply with the Convention, custom, tradition and failure to enforce these laws in reality contravene the Convention.

16. A woman's right to choose a spouse and enter freely into marriage is central to her life and to her dignity and equality as a human being. An examination of States parties' reports discloses that there are countries which, on the basis of custom, religious beliefs or the ethnic origins of particular groups of people, permit forced marriages or remarriages. Other countries allow a woman's marriage to be arranged for payment or preferment and in others women's poverty forces them to marry foreign nationals for financial security. Subject to reasonable restrictions based for example on a woman's youth or consanguinity with her partner, a woman's right to choose when, if, and whom she will marry must be protected and enforced at law.

Article 16 (1) (c)

17. An examination of States parties' reports discloses that many countries in their legal systems provide for the rights and responsibilities of married partners by relying on the application of common law principles, religious or customary law, rather than by complying with the principles contained in the Convention. These variations in law and practice relating to marriage have wide-ranging consequences for women, invariably restricting their rights to equal status and responsibility within marriage. Such limitations often result in the husband being accorded the status of head of household and primary decision-maker and therefore contravene the provisions of the Convention.

18. Moreover, generally a de facto union is not given legal protection at all. Women living in such relationships should have their equality of status with men both in family life and in the sharing of income and assets protected by law. Such women should share equal rights and responsibilities with men for the care and raising of dependent children or family members.

Article 16 (1) (d) and (f)

19. As provided in article 5 (b), most States recognize the shared responsibility of parents for the care, protection and maintenance of children. The principle that "the best interests of the child shall be the paramount consideration" has been included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Assembly resolution 44/25, annex) and seems now to be universally accepted. However, in practice, some countries do not observe the principle of granting the parents of children equal status, particularly when they are not married. The children of such unions do not always enjoy the same status as those born in wedlock and, where the mothers are divorced or living apart, many fathers fail to share the responsibility of care, protection and maintenance of their children.

20. The shared rights and responsibilities enunciated in the Convention should be enforced at law and as appropriate through legal concepts of guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption. States parties should ensure that by their laws both parents, regardless of their marital status and whether they live with their children or not, share equal rights and responsibilities for their children.

Article 16 (1) (e)

21. The responsibilities that women have to bear and raise children affect their right of access to education, employment and other activities related to their personal development. They also impose inequitable burdens of work on women. The number and spacing of their children have a similar impact on women's lives and also affect their physical and mental health, as well as that of their children. For these reasons, women are entitled to decide on the number and spacing of their children.

22. Some reports disclose coercive practices which have serious consequences for women, such as forced pregnancies, abortions or sterilization. Decisions to have children or not, while preferably made in consultation with spouse or partner, must not nevertheless be limited by spouse, parent, partner or Government. In order to make an informed decision about safe and reliable contraceptive measures, women must have information about contraceptive measures and their use, and guaranteed access to sex education and family planning services, as provided in article 10 (h) of the Convention.

23. There is general agreement that where there are freely available appropriate measures for the voluntary regulation of fertility, the health, development and well-being of all members of the family improves. Moreover, such services improve the general quality of life and health of the population, and the voluntary regulation of population growth helps preserve the environment and achieve sustainable economic and social development.

Article 16 (1) (g)

24. A stable family is one which is based on principles of equity, justice and individual fulfilment for each member. Each partner must therefore have the right to choose a profession or employment that is best suited to his or her abilities, qualifications and aspirations, as provided in article 11 (a) and (c) of the Convention. Moreover, each partner should have the right to choose his or her name, thereby preserving individuality and identity in the community and distinguishing that person from other members of society. When by law or custom a woman is obliged to change her name on marriage or at its dissolution, she is denied these rights.

Article 16 (1) (h)

25. The rights provided in this article overlap with and complement those in article 15 (2) in which an obligation is placed on States to give women equal rights to enter into and conclude contracts and to administer property.

26. Article 15 (1) guarantees women equality with men before the law. The right to own, manage, enjoy and dispose of property is central to a woman's right to enjoy financial independence, and in many countries will be critical to her ability to earn a livelihood and to provide adequate housing and nutrition for herself and for her family.

27. In countries that are undergoing a programme of agrarian reform or redistribution of land among groups of different ethnic origins, the right of women, regardless of marital status, to share such redistributed land on equal terms with men should be carefully observed.

28. In most countries, a significant proportion of the women are single or divorced and many have the sole responsibility to support a family. Any discrimination in the division of property that rests on the premise that the man alone is responsible for the support of the women and children of his family and that he can and will honourably discharge this responsibility is clearly unrealistic. Consequently, any law or custom that grants men a right to a greater share of property at the end of a marriage or de facto relationship, or on the death of a relative, is discriminatory and will have a serious impact on a woman's practical ability to divorce her husband, to support herself or her family and to live in dignity as an independent person.

29. All of these rights should be guaranteed regardless of a woman's marital status.

Marital property

30. There are countries that do not acknowledge that right of women to own an equal share of the property with the husband during a marriage or de facto relationship and when that marriage or relationship ends. Many countries recognize that right, but the practical ability of women to exercise it may be limited by legal precedent or custom.

31. Even when these legal rights are vested in women, and the courts enforce them, property owned by a woman during marriage or on divorce may be managed by a man. In many States, including those where there is a community-property regime, there is no legal requirement that a woman be consulted when property owned by the parties during marriage or de facto relationship is sold or otherwise disposed of. This limits the woman's ability to control disposition of the property or the income derived from it.

32. In some countries, on division of marital property, greater emphasis is placed on financial contributions to property acquired during a marriage, and other contributions, such as raising children, caring for elderly relatives and discharging household duties are diminished. Often, such contributions of a non-financial nature by the wife enable the husband to earn an income and increase the assets. Financial and non-financial contributions should be accorded the same weight.

33. In many countries, property accumulated during a de facto relationship is not treated at law on the same basis as property acquired during marriage. Invariably, if the relationship ends, the woman receives a significantly lower share than her partner. Property laws and customs that discriminate in this way against married or unmarried women with or without children should be revoked and discouraged.

Inheritance

34. Reports of States parties should include comment on the legal or customary provisions relating to inheritance laws as they affect the status of women as provided in the Convention and in Economic and Social Council resolution 884D (XXXIV), in which the Council recommended that States ensure that men and women in the same degree of relationship to a deceased are entitled to equal shares in the estate and to equal rank in the order of succession. That provision has not been generally implemented.

35. There are many countries where the law and practice concerning inheritance and property result in serious discrimination against women. As a result of this uneven treatment, women may receive a smaller share of the husband's or father's property at his death than would widowers and sons. In some instances, women are granted limited and controlled rights and receive income only from the deceased's property. Often inheritance rights for widows do not reflect the principles of equal ownership of property acquired during marriage. Such provisions contravene the Convention and should be abolished.

Article 16 (2)

36. In the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights, held at Vienna from 14 to 25 June 1993, States are urged to repeal existing laws and regulations and to remove customs and practices which discriminate against and cause harm to the girl child. Article 16 (2) and the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child preclude States parties from permitting or giving validity to a marriage between persons who have not attained their majority. In the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, "a child means every human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier". Notwithstanding this definition, and bearing in mind the provisions of the Vienna Declaration, the Committee considers that the minimum age for marriage should be 18 years for both man and woman. When men and women marry, they assume important responsibilities. Consequently, marriage should not be permitted before they have attained full maturity and capacity to act. According to the World Health Organization, when minors, particularly girls, marry and have children, their health can be adversely affected and their education is impeded. As a result their economic autonomy is restricted.

37. This not only affects women personally but also limits the development of their skills and independence and reduces access to employment, thereby detrimentally affecting their families and communities.

38. Some countries provide for different ages for marriage for men and women. As such provisions assume incorrectly that women have a different rate of intellectual development from men, or that their stage of physical and intellectual development at marriage is immaterial, these provisions should be abolished. In other countries, the betrothal of girls or undertakings by family members on their behalf is permitted. Such measures contravene not only the Convention, but also a women's right freely to choose her partner.

39. States parties should also require the registration of all marriages whether contracted civilly or according to custom or religious law. The State can thereby ensure compliance with the Convention and establish equality between partners, a minimum age for marriage, prohibition of bigamy and polygamy and the protection of the rights of children.

Recommendations

Violence against women

40. In considering the place of women in family life, the Committee wishes to stress that the provisions of general recommendation 19 (eleventh session) concerning violence against women have great significance for women's abilities to enjoy rights and freedoms on an equal basis with men. States parties are urged to comply with that general recommendation to ensure that, in both public and family life, women will be free of the gender-based violence that so seriously impedes their rights and freedoms as individuals.

Reservations

41. The Committee has noted with alarm the number of States parties which have entered reservations to the whole or part of article 16, especially when a reservation has also been entered to article 2, claiming that compliance may conflict with a commonly held vision of the family based, *inter alia*, on cultural or religious beliefs or on the country's economic or political status.

42. Many of these countries hold a belief in the patriarchal structure of a family which places a father, husband or son in a favourable position. In some countries where fundamentalist or other extremist views or economic hardships have encouraged a return to old values and traditions, women's place in the family has deteriorated sharply. In others, where it has been recognized that a modern society depends for its economic advance and for the general good of the community on involving all adults equally, regardless of gender, these taboos and reactionary or extremist ideas have progressively been discouraged.

43. Consistent with articles 2, 3 and 24 in particular, the Committee requires that all States parties gradually progress to a stage where, by its resolute discouragement of notions of the inequality of women in the home, each country will withdraw its reservation, in particular to articles 9, 15 and 16 of the Convention.

44. States parties should resolutely discourage any notions of inequality of women and men which are affirmed by laws, or by religious or private law or by custom, and progress to the stage where reservations, particularly to article 16, will withdrawn.

45. The Committee noted, on the basis of its examination of initial and subsequent periodic reports, that in some States parties to the Convention that had ratified or acceded without reservation, certain laws, especially those dealing with family, do not actually conform to the provisions of the Convention.

46. Their laws still contain many measures which discriminate against women based on norms, customs and socio-cultural prejudices. These States, because of their specific situation regarding these articles, make it difficult for the Committee to evaluate and understand the status of women.

47. The Committee, in particular on the basis of articles 1 and 2 of the Convention, requests that those States parties make the necessary efforts to examine the de facto situation relating to the issues and to introduce the required measures in their national legislations still containing provisions discriminatory to women.

Reports

48. Assisted by the comments in the present general recommendation, in their reports States parties should:

(a) Indicate the stage that has been reached in the country's progress to removal of all reservations to the Convention, in particular reservations to article 16;

(b) Set out whether their laws comply with the principles of articles 9, 15 and 16 and where, by reason of religious or private law or custom, compliance with the law or with the Convention is impeded.

Legislation

49. States parties should, where necessary to comply with the Convention, in particular in order to comply with articles 9, 15 and 16, enact and enforce legislation.

Encouraging compliance with the Convention

50. Assisted by the comments in the present general recommendation, and as required by articles 2, 3 and 24, States parties should introduce measures directed at encouraging full compliance with the principles of the Convention, particularly where religious or private law or custom conflict with those principles.

General recommendation 22 (fourteenth session): Amending article 20 of the Convention

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

Noting that the States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, at the request of the General Assembly, will meeting during 1995 to consider amending article 20 of the Convention,

Recalling its previous decision, taken at its tenth session, to ensure effectiveness in its work and prevent the building up of an undesirable backlog in the consideration of reports of States parties, Recalling that the Convention is one of the international human rights instruments that has been ratified by the largest number of States parties,

Considering that the articles of the Convention address the fundamental human rights of women in all aspects of their daily lives and in all areas of society and the State,

Concerned about the workload of the Committee as a result of the growing number of ratifications, in addition to the backlog of reports pending consideration, as reflected in annex I,

Concerned also about the long lapse of time between the submission of reports of States parties and their consideration, resulting in the need for States to provide additional information for updating their reports,

Bearing in mind that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women is the only human rights treaty body whose meeting time is limited by its Convention, and that it has the shortest duration of meeting time of all the human rights treaty bodies, as reflected in annex II,

Noting that the limitation on the duration of sessions, as contained in the Convention has become a serious obstacle to the effective performance by the Committee of its functions under the Convention,

1. Recommends that the States parties favourably consider amending article 20 of the Convention in respect of the meeting time of the Committee, so as to allow it to meet annually for such duration as is necessary for the effective performance of its functions under the Convention, with no specific restriction except for that which the General Assembly shall decide;

2. Recommends also that the General Assembly, pending the completion of an amendment process, authorize the Committee to meet exceptionally in 1996 for two sessions, each of three weeks' duration and each being preceded by pre-session working groups;

3. Recommends further that the meeting of States parties receive an oral report from the Chairperson of the Committee on the difficulties faced by the Committee in performing its functions;

4. Recommends that the Secretary-General make available to the States parties at their meeting all relevant information on the workload of the Committee and comparative information in respect of the other human rights treaty bodies.

Annex I

LIST OF GENERAL COMMENTS ADOPTED BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

Thirteenth session (1981)

General comment 1	Reporting obligation
General comment 2	Reporting guidelines
General comment 3	Article 2: Implementation at the national level
General comment 4	Article 3
General comment 5	Article 4

Sixteenth session (1982)

General comment 6	Article 6
General comment 7	Article 7*
General comment 8	Article 9
General comment 9	Article 10*

Nineteenth session (1983)

General comment 10	Article 19
General comment 11	Article 20

Twenty-first session (1984)

General comment 12	Article 1
General comment 13	Article 14

Twenty-third session (1984)

General comment 14	Article 6

Twenty-seventh session (1986)

General comment 15	The position of aliens under the Covenant

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* General comments 7 and 9 were replaced by General comments 20 and 21, respectively.

Thirty-second session (1988)

General comment 16	Article 17

Thirty-fifth session (1989)

General comment 17	Article 24

Thirty-seventh session (1989)

General comment 18	Non-discrimination

Thirty-ninth session (1990)

General comment 19	Article 23

Forty-fourth session (1992)

General comment 20	Article 7
General comment 21	Article 10

Forty-eighth session (1993)

General comment 22	Article 18

Fiftieth session (1994)

General comment 23	Article 27

Fifty-second session (1994)

General comment 24	General comment on issues relating to reservations made upon ratification or accession to the Covenant or the Optional Protocols thereto, or in relation to declarations under article 41 of the Covenant

Annex II

LIST OF GENERAL COMMENTS ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Third session (1989)	
General comment 1	Reporting by States parties
Fourth session (1990)	
General comment 2	International technical assistance measures (art. 22 of the Covenant)
Fifth session (1990)	
General comment 3	The nature of States parties obligations (art. 2, para. 1 of the Covenant)
Sixth session (1991)	
General comment 4	The right to adequate housing (art. 11 (1) of the Covenant)
Eleventh session (1994)	
General comment 5	Persons with disabilities
Thirteenth session (1995)	
General comment 6	The economic, social and cultural rights of older persons

Annex III

LIST OF GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Fifth session (1972)	
General recommendation I	States parties' obligations (art. 4 of the Convention)
General recommendation II	States parties obligations
Sixth session (1972)	
General recommendation III	Reporting by States parties
Eighth session (1973)	
General recommendation IV	Reporting by States parties (art. 1 of the Convention)
Fifteenth session (1977)	
General recommendation V	Reporting by States parties (art. 7 of the Convention)
Twenty-fifth session (1982)	
General recommendation VI	Overdue reports
Thirty-second session (1985)	
General recommendation VII	Implementation of article 4 of the Convention
Thirty-eighth session (1990)	
General recommendation VIII	Interpretation and application of article 1, paragraphs 1 and 4, of the Convention
General recommendation IX	Application of article 8, paragraph 1 of the Convention
Thirty-ninth session (1991)	
General recommendation X	Technical assistance

Forty-second session (1993)

General recommendation XI	Non-citizens
General recommendation XII	Successor States
General recommendation XIII	Training of law enforcement officials in the protection of human rights
General recommendation XIV	Article 1, paragraph 1, of the Convention
General recommendation XV	Article 4 of the Convention
General recommendation XVI	Application of article 9 of the Convention
General recommendation XVII	The establishment of national institutions to facilitate the implementation of the Convention

Forty-fourth session (1994)

General recommendation XVIII	Establishment of an international tribunal to prosecute crimes against humanity

Forty-seventh session (1995)

General recommendation XIX	Article 3 of the Convention

Annex IV

LIST OF GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Fifth session (1986)

General recommendation No. 1	Reporting by States parties

Sixth session (1987)

General recommendation No. 2	Reporting by States parties
General recommendation No. 3	Education and public information campaigns
General recommendation No. 4	Reservations

Seventh session (1988)

General recommendation No. 5	Temporary special measures
General recommendation No. 6	Effective national machinery and publicity
General recommendation No. 7	Resources
General recommendation No. 8	Implementation of article 8 of the Convention

Eighth session (1989)

General recommendation No. 9	Statistical data concerning the situation of women
General recommendation No. 10	Tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
General recommendation No. 11	Technical advisory services for reporting obligations
General recommendation No. 12	Violence against women
General recommendation No. 13	Equal remuneration for work of equal value

Ninth session (1990)

General recommendation No. 14	Female circumcision
General recommendation No. 15	Avoidance of discrimination against women in national strategies for the prevention and control of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)

Tenth session (1991)

General recommendation No. 16	Unpaid women workers in rural and urban family enterprises
General recommendation No. 17	Measurement and quantification of the unremunerated domestic activities of women and their recognition in the gross national product
General recommendation No. 18	Disabled women

Eleventh session (1992)

General recommendation No. 19	Violence against Women
General recommendation No. 20	Reservations to the Convention
General recommendation No. 21	Equality in marriage and family relations
General recommendation No. 22	Amending article 20 of the Convention

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